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Foreign language education: Principles of teaching English to adults at commercial language schools and centers

Oleg Tarnopolsky[1]*

*Corresponding author: Oleg Tarnopolsky, Department of Applied Linguistics and Methods in Foreign Language Teaching, Alfred Nobel University, Golovposhtamt, Abonentska Skrynka 856, Dnipropetrovsk 49000, Ukraine
E-mail: otarnopolsky@mail.ru

Abstract: The ever-increasing spread of English as the language of global communication leads to ever-increasing demand for learning it among adult populations of non-English-speaking countries. If such people did not have a chance of acquiring English during their school or university years but urgently need it for professional or personal purposes, they have no other choice but to go and learn it at courses offered by numerous commercial language schools and centers. In post-Communist countries, such as Ukraine, commercial language schools and centers are responsible for English language training of the majority of adults learning that language after their secondary or tertiary school studies. They also serve the needs of many high and higher schools' students who, due to various reasons, are not satisfied with learning English at their educational institutions. However, despite the importance and spread of this specific type of language education, its pedagogical and methodological foundations have hardly been developed at all. The present article is an attempt of partly filling this gap in pedagogy and methodology of English language education in non-English-speaking countries. The paper develops some theoretical underpinnings of that kind of education in the form of six principles underlying the organization of commercial English language courses, formulating their goals, selecting the learning contents, and choosing the methods of teaching and learning. The practical consequences of adopting the six suggested principles are outlined.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Oleg Tarnopolsky is Doctor of Pedagogy, full professor, PhD. He heads the Department of Applied Linguistics and Methods in Foreign Language Teaching at Alfred Nobel University in Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine, and specializes in research and practical teaching in the field of teaching/learning English as a foreign language. He is also the author of more than 350 publications (books, articles, textbooks) published not only in Ukraine and Russia but also in the USA, the UK, Canada, France, Spain, China, Israel, Germany, Serbia, and the Czech Republic. He has made more than 180 presentations at conferences, seminars, and workshops—not only in Ukraine and all over the former USSR but also abroad (the USA, Spain, Great Britain, France, Finland, Switzerland, Poland, Greece, the Netherlands, Austria, Monaco, the Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, China, and Thailand). Oleg Tarnopolsky holds the Fulbright Awards (USA) for 1994 and 2005.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The present study aims toward developing the underpinnings of English language training of adults at commercial language schools in non-English-speaking countries. Though this specific form of teaching/learning English is very popular and spread the world over, its theoretical and practical foundations are practically not elaborated. In this article, an attempt is made to start developing the underlying theory for optimizing teaching English as a foreign language to adults at commercial language courses. Six principles are suggested for organizing commercial English language courses, and although these principles have all been developed on the basis of experience and teaching practice gained in one country (Ukraine), they may be considered as relevant for commercial English language education wherever it is organized. Therefore, this article can be of some interest to all researchers in teaching English as a foreign language and to all practitioners involved in commercial English language education.

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1. Introduction

The integration and internationalization of the world today requiring a common language to be equally and efficiently used by representatives of all countries, nations, and cultures has enormously increased the demand for learning English which has become not simply the language of international communication (like many others, such as Spanish or French) but that of planetary, or global communication (Graddol, 2006). The absence of free command of English as the global medium of communication means great limitations for a person in their educational, professional, career, and even personal opportunities restricting such a person to living and functioning only inside one *speech community* (in Hymes' terminology, 1986), that of their own, without any chance of going beyond its narrow borders. Actually, in the twenty-first century's "global village" not being fluent in English is somewhat akin to functional illiteracy.

The trend for providing everyone in the world with a good command of English for international intercourse has become very prominent in post-Communist countries, such as Ukraine, where hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of people are learning English for improving their life prospects. In that country children and teenagers are not in the absolute majority of English learners as might be expected. Adult people of almost all ages and from almost all strata of society are very active in their efforts to achieve English language proficiency sufficient for their personal or professional needs. But most adult people who are learning English now have already finished their secondary or even higher education. So, they are having their training in English at different commercial language schools or centers mushrooming all over the country. Though nobody has ever analyzed it statistically, the English language education that is provided by commercial language schools or centers is typical for many countries of the world. It is enough to remember the numbers of commercial schools of English prospering not only in English-speaking countries (the UK, Australia, and the others) but also a multitude of such schools functioning in Switzerland, Austria, the Netherlands, and in many other European countries where English is not the national language. But one peculiarity in this respect of the post-Communist countries of the former USSR, such as Ukraine, is the fact that courses of English offered by commercial schools and centers often attract not only those students who cannot join language programs at secondary schools and universities because they have already finished their secondary and tertiary education. Students of secondary and tertiary educational institutions are often also enrolled for studying English at commercial language centers, while at the same time studying that language at their high and higher schools where it is a mandatory subject and taught free of charge.

This, seemingly strange, phenomenon, which was greatly spread in the first years after Ukraine had gained its independence, was explained in our article published in the USA at the end of the last century (Tarnopolsky, 1996). However, though very many things have changed since that time, preferences of a number of high and higher school students for commercial language learning, instead of learning English at their own schools and universities, are still felt, though they may be not so pronounced. This means that some of the causes of the phenomenon discussed in the article mentioned above are still in force. That is why it is worth to list such, still active, causes in the context of this article.

The principal cause is the dissatisfaction with the results of language studies at state-owned secondary and tertiary schools felt by those who are learning English now or were learning it before. It is because of that dissatisfaction that thousands of not only adult people who had finished their secondary or tertiary education start learning English anew in commercial language programs. Such dissatisfaction is also the reason of "parallel" language studies by present-day high and higher

school students who learn English simultaneously at their schools or universities and at commercial language centers.

Present and former students' dissatisfaction with English learning outcomes at Ukrainian secondary and tertiary schools is, in its turn, caused by four shortcomings of language teaching there that make achieving satisfactory results hardly possible:

(1) Teaching and learning methods are frequently quite obsolete and of very low efficiency, like the grammar-translation method practically forgotten by really competent teachers of English but still widely used at Ukrainian state-owned educational institutions because the teachers there often know nothing better.

(2) The number of class hours allocated for teaching and learning English at state-owned educational institutions are often too few and insufficient for getting even minimal results. For instance, there are sometimes no more than two academic hours of English classes per week, though as far back as 1970s Strevens (1977, p. 29) showed that, if the numbers of class hours of English per week are less than four or five, the learning outcomes decline disastrously. Besides, teachers of English at such institutions are often not competent enough to try and compensate the lack of class hours by organizing students' autonomous language learning (Benson & Voller, 1997; Dam, 2002).

(3) Due to their poor funding, state-owned educational institutions frequently cannot afford the best textbooks and learning materials that are frequently quite costly. They are not allowed to make students buy them (according to the existing regulations, it is the state-owned school that has to provide all the learning materials for learners). That is why such institutions often use low-quality but cheap learning materials in the teaching/learning process. They rarely can afford teaching a foreign language with the help of computers either which also lowers learning outcomes because computers in foreign language teaching and learning is not conventional teaching and learning plus computer but a new and much more efficient paradigm of language teaching and learning (Warschauer & Whittaker, 1997, p. 28).

(4) The motivation of students often suffers if they learn English as a mandatory discipline at state-owned educational institutions and are really eager to acquire it. They frequently have to study in the same group with students who are indifferent to the subject or are at a lower level of language command and, therefore, slow down the progress of more advanced or more highly motivated students. So, learning may not be made really learner-centered. And that, in its turn, demotivates initially highly motivated students because for them the balance between process (the learning process into which they invest great efforts) and product (the learning results) is lost (Hyland & Hyland, 1992).

As it has already been said, the four factors discussed above are most often the causes of low English learning results at state-owned educational institutions in Ukraine—those results which urge motivated students to find an alternative source of English language acquisition at commercial language schools and centers. Nowadays these factors are slowly losing their influence at higher schools. The situation is gradually improving in state-owned universities and it is improving even faster in private ones that are free from centralized regulations and are more flexible economically.

However, the changes for the better are too slow even at the state-owned higher schools. They are especially slow (if there are any) at the secondary schools where in the last 20 years the situation has not noticeably improved in comparison with what had been described in our article published almost 20 years ago (cf. Tarnopolsky, 1996). As a result, when students come to university with very little English after their secondary school course of it, they often have to start learning the language almost from the very beginning. And in this case, even if the university's course of English is up to today's standards, there is simply not enough time and opportunities to achieve the level of proficiency required by motivated students. Because of that, they even now try to find the solution in attending commercial English courses with a good reputation. And this means that commercial

English teaching/learning is most probably here to stay in Ukraine for years to come. Of course, it does not mean that it is always ideal and totally free of those shortcomings that were discussed above. But if a commercial language school does have them, it will simply be forced to close very quickly because dissatisfied students will stop attending and paying. So, when a commercial language center or school successfully functions for years or even decades, it is already a sufficient guarantee that it does not have those shortcomings that cause failures at secondary schools and universities. All the more so that it is much simpler for commercial language centers to get rid of those shortcomings because:

(a) they are vitally interested in employing the most qualified teachers competent in most efficient modern methods of teaching since it is only such teachers who students-customers "vote for" by attending classes and paying money for tuition;

(b) they can introduce whatever number of class hours of English per week as long as those numbers are acceptable to students-customers;

(c) they can afford the best, even expensive, textbooks, learning materials, and equipment which are mostly purchased at students-customers' expense;

(d) they are able to form homogenous groups for learning English with students having similar or identical levels of language command and similar needs.

Just those characteristics of successful commercial language schools and centers make them so popular with Ukrainian students-customers and attract those students-customers to them. However, despite the spread and popularity of commercial English language teaching and learning, this, quite specific, form of language education has not been researched sufficiently in language teaching/learning pedagogy and methodology. That is true not only of Ukraine and all post-Communist countries but also of quite a number of other countries in the world where, as it has already been mentioned, this form of English language training has been spread. It can be considered as quite a serious drawback because, if great numbers of language learners are embraced by such a form and if it involves great numbers of teachers, it deserves being thoroughly researched. Such research is needed for taking full account of teaching/learning peculiarities with the aim of developing specific but optimal organizational patterns, methods of teaching, ways of formulating the teaching goals, and selecting learning contents.

With the aim of compensating for this drawback we have been conducting (for more than 20 years now) research into the commercial form of English teaching and learning in Ukraine. The research has been conducted and is still being conducted at *The Commercial Foreign Language Center* functioning on the premises and under the aegis of Alfred Nobel University, Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine. That *Commercial Foreign Language Center* (further called *Center*) has been operating quite successfully since 1993, i.e. for longer than 23 years, and that has given an opportunity of collecting and analyzing quite a lot of research materials connected with commercial foreign language education.

The objective of this article is to analyze the foundations of the commercial system of English language teaching and learning developed by us at the *Center*. We consider those foundations to be a set of *basic strategies*, formulated as *teaching/learning principles*, which regulate: (1) the organization and development of the structure of teaching/learning (such as what particular language courses should be included in the program, how long each of them should be taught, the number of class hours per week, etc.); (2) what methods of teaching and learning are supposed to be used; (3) how teaching/learning goals should be formulated; and (4) how learning contents should be selected. The suggested principles may be considered, if not as universal, at least as applicable to a whole number of countries where English as a foreign language is taught at commercial language schools and centers. Six general principles were developed and in the article they are discussed one after the other in the order of their hierarchy. It should only be noted that in Ukraine, as it is clear from what has been said above, high and higher school students often learn English at commercial language centers in the same groups with adult people who have already finished their secondary and tertiary

education. Since our experience has proven that the former should be taught exactly as the latter, we include the former category of students after 16–17 years of age into the category of adults with the developed principles applicable to them just the same as to older post-university learners.

In accordance with what has been said above, *the article is structured* as a detailed discussion of all the six suggested principles, their essence and meaning, the reasons for advancing them, and the practical consequences of their implementation.

2. The principle of developing English courses on the basis of learners' needs and interests

Probably, the most characteristic feature of those adults (even if they are as young as high or higher school students usually are) who are enrolled for studying English at commercial courses is their being well aware why and wherefore they are doing that. This is why to launch a successful language school or center, its organizers should have a very clear idea what their potential students' needs, requirements, and interests are. Naturally, such an idea should be formed not only when the students are already enrolled and courses for them are developed (in the actual process of teaching) but also before that. That is what "*the principle of developing English courses on the basis of learners' needs and interests*" is called upon to regulate.

As it has already been mentioned, our *Center* was opened in 1993 but, following the principle above, before that, in 1991/1992, we had been interviewing *potential* students (those who had demonstrated interest in learning English at commercial language courses) to obtain clear evidence about their needs and desires in acquiring the language. In fact, such interviewing, which is discussed at length further in the paper was *the first research method* used by us because the goal was quite practical—determining how to structure a commercial English program so as to satisfy in the best possible manner the needs and requirements of the absolute majority of potential and actual students. Interviewing was also accompanied by observations of the actual teaching/learning process, analyzing what students were doing in it and what they were saying concerning the organization of that process and their own learning in it. Such observations and analysis can be considered as *the second research method*.

The interviewing was organized in the city of Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine and 300 people between 17 and 45 years of age were interviewed: businesspeople, government employees, engineers, doctors, high and higher school students, industrial workers, researchers, and some others (Tarnopolsky, 1999, pp. 40–41).

The first question that they were asked in the interviews was whether they were interested in acquiring the skills in all the four basic forms of communication in English (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) or only in some of them. (The full list of questions used in our early interviewing sessions and still used in the interviewing sessions nowadays is given in Appendix 1 to this article.) It became obvious that 59% of the interviewees wanted to acquire only speaking and listening skills and considered reading and writing of secondary importance. 41% of the interviewees also considered oral skills of primary importance for themselves, but they stated that reading was no less important—though they believed that such skills were to be developed only after the oral communication ones. It is also interesting to note that not more than 26% of the interviewees stated that writing in English was a skill of some significance to them, too.

In 1991/1992 such results of the interviews seemed quite natural because in that period citizens of Ukraine wanted the command of English only for short trips abroad (primarily for vacations or for establishing some business contacts). That is why oral speech was the most important to them. That is also why, when answering the other question in the interview: what English they needed most—General English or some kind of ESP (English for Specific, or professional, Purposes),—70% of the interviewees said that their final goal was some ESP, Business English in 60% of cases. But all the

interviewees (100%) were confident that first they had to acquire General English and only after that start learning Business English.

It is due to such interviewing results that the first courses developed by us and offered at our *Center* in the year of its opening were the courses of General English for teaching oral communication in English followed by a course of reading in English. In its turn, that was followed by a course of Business English.

However, when identical interviewing was organized again in 1996/1997 (that time only 225 interviewees of the same age and occupational categories participated in it—Tarnopolsky, 2000, p. 214), the results made us introduce a number of corrections in the system of courses offered by the *Center*. Again, potential students considered oral communication in English to be the most important for them, wanting to learn General English first and Business English (65% of interviewees) afterwards. But the attitudes toward the written forms of communication in English had changed dramatically. The overwhelming majority (85% or 191potential learners out of 225) emphasized that they were in need of all the four communication skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing). Of these people, 99 (52%) claimed that speaking and listening were of primary importance but they also absolutely needed reading and writing. All the four skills were claimed to be of equal importance by 52 (27%) potential learners, and a considerable percentage of interviewees (40 or 21%) stressed that although they needed speaking and listening skills in English, they required reading and writing skills even more for their jobs. Such results were due to a change in situation. 1991/1992 was the period of initial contacts of the Ukrainian public, businesspeople, and specialists with people from other countries and potential foreign partners. Such contacts mainly necessitated personal meetings and oral communication. The years 1996/1997 were the period of expending, growing, or even well-established and regular contacts on personal and professional levels. That required dealing with foreign friends or partners not so much in person as through written (printed) papers, documents, letters, etc.

Interviewing both in 1991/1992 and in 1996/1997 clearly demonstrated one important condition for organizing efficient and successful commercial English language courses: not more than one Business English course is required since it can be started only at the intermediate level of students' General English command and make them progress in Business English acquisition from the intermediate to the advanced level (Tarnopolsky, 2012). On the other hand, there must be numerous levels of General English courses—from the beginner's/elementary level to the advanced one. Students enrolled for learning English at commercial language school and centers have very different starting levels in their command of General English, beginning with the zero level, and placement tests administered at enrollment (Paltridge, 1992) should direct them to a course corresponding to their real level of initial language proficiency or absence of it. It should also be taken into account that students come with different goals as to what level of General English they want to reach as the result of their studies, and there should be an entire spectrum of different level courses to meet all such requirements.

After the interviewing in 1996/1997, there was no need of repeated mass interviewing of *potential* learners. Since all the core courses for the program had already been developed on the basis of the preceding analyses, it was sufficient to regularly interview the enrolled students for obtaining information about their changing requirements and interests. *Such interviewing of actually enrolled students with using the same questions as above and those indicated further below* (cf. also Appendix 1) *has been implemented on a permanent basis since 1997 until today, so that every year not less than 60–70% of our actual learners are interviewed.* It is interesting to note that with the course of years, students' attitudes and opinions practically have not changed. For instance, in 1996/1997 interviewing 85% of potential learners emphasized that they were in need of all the four communication skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) but considered oral communication in English to be the most important for them. In 2003 the corresponding figure for actual learners was 89%, in 2010—84%, in 2014—again 85%. If in 1996/1997 interviewing 65% of potential learners stated that they

wanted Business English after General English, in 2003 this figure dropped to 63%, in 2010 it rose to 68%, and in 2014 dropped again to 64% (but all the figures remaining very close to 65% of 1996/1997 interviewing). The same can be said about all the other figures given above and below in this article so that they can be considered as quite up-to-date.

However, if later interviewing has not demonstrated changes in attitudes and opinions, it demonstrated new students' needs and interests in what concerns some new courses that they desired to have included in the program. In this way, in the first years of the twenty-first century an increasing number of students were found to become interested in training for taking international examinations in English, such as Cambridge FCE (English First since 2015), CAE (English Advanced since 2015), and IELTS. Their aim was receiving an internationally recognized certificate of English proficiency for continuing their studies or for getting a job abroad. Such exam-training courses were first introduced at the *Center* in 2003; they have been functioning since that time and have become one of the principal directions in the *Center's* activities. Since 2011 quite a few students started inquiring about such a specific ESP as English for Psychologists, and such a course was also developed, introduced, and began functioning in 2013.

As the result of the discussed learners' need analysis, nine courses were included in the *Center's* program:

(1) A short preparatory introductory course of English pronunciation for total beginners. The course is also designed for learners to develop the most elementary communicative skills, such as greeting, apologizing, thanking, introducing oneself, etc.

(2) The beginner's/elementary course of oral communication in English for meeting the requirements of those who go abroad for a short period of time (for instance, tourism). The aim of the course was to achieve learners' level of English A1+/A2 according to the Council's of Europe *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2001).

(3) The course of speaking, listening, reading, and writing in English on the pre-intermediate level with the aim of learners' achieving the level B1 according to the Council's of Europe *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2001).

(4) The course of speaking, listening, reading, and writing in English on the intermediate level with the aim of learners' achieving the level B1+/B2 according to the Council's of Europe *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2001).

(5) The course of training for Cambridge international examination of English FCE/English First (speaking, listening, reading, and writing)—the upper-intermediate level, or level B2+ according to the Council's of Europe *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2001).

(6) The course of training for Cambridge international examination of English CAE/English Advanced (speaking, listening, reading, and writing)—the advanced level, or level C1 according to the Council's of Europe *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2001).

(7) The course of training for Cambridge international examination of English IELTS (speaking, listening, reading, and writing)—the advanced level, or level C1 according to the Council's of Europe *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2001).

(8) The course of Business English (speaking, listening, reading, and writing)—the level from intermediate to advanced, from B2 to C1.

(9) The course of English for Psychologists (speaking, listening, reading, and writing)—the level from intermediate to advanced, from B2 to C1.

Even from the list of developed courses above it can be seen how well they meet students' needs stated during interviewing and in the process of learning. It is so thanks to following faithfully the principle discussed above (and that principle certainly implies the requirement of changing the list

with learners' new needs and interests emerging). However, the principle in question cannot help in deciding how each of the courses should be taught so as to meet students' expectations and not to provoke their negative reactions in the learning process. That particular aspect is regulated by another principle.

3. The principle of taking into account learners' attitudes to the methods of teaching English

There was no doubt for us, and in the course of 23 years our talks with both potential and enrolled learners at our *Center* has confirmed that conviction, that all of them wanted to learn English for communication only, but not for studying the language system as such. However, how they believed it was best for them to acquire English for communicative purposes was a different question requiring clarification. To get a more or less clear answer, we formulated three questions to include into our interviewing processes in 1991/1992 and 1996/1997. These questions have been used in the following interviewing of actual learners since 1997 and are planned to be used in future. The questions are: "How do you believe it is better to learn a foreign language—in communication only or by the way of focusing on language forms and practicing them?", "Are both approaches necessary in language learning and which of them should dominate, if any?", "What learning activities from the list that I have given you are the most attractive and interesting for you?" Besides the answers obtained to those three direct questions, even more materials as to students' attitudes, likes, and dislikes in what concerns the ways and methods of learning English were supplied by what learners were saying in the learning process itself and through observing them in that process.

Both from the answers to the questions above and from students' statements and observations in the teaching/learning process it became quite clear that learners were interested in communication only (the most frequent statement was "*I want to learn to speak English*") and, thereby, they found the communicative approach to teaching and learning the most attractive to them (96% in 1991/1992, 93% in 1996/1997, and from 94 to 97% in all the following years). Just the same could be said concerning the attractiveness for students of the communicative learning activities, such as, for instance, role plays (practically the same percentage of respondents).

Therefore, our primary direction in teaching adopted even before the elaboration of the first courses had started was meeting students' own requirements, wishes, and expectations. And that direction, as it has already been mentioned, was developing students' communicative competence in English (Paulston, 1992) by way of their learning communication in communication and through communication.

However, students' elaborations of their answers to the questions "How do you believe it is better to learn a foreign language—in communication only or by the way of focusing on language forms and practicing them?", "Are both approaches necessary in language learning and which of them should dominate, if any?" were, to quite a considerable degree, in contradiction with what was said above. Although the overwhelming majority of respondents (cf. the percentage figures above) affirm that they like and want to learn the language through communication and the communicative learning activities, at the same time they are absolutely confident that purely communicative learning is impossible. They believe (90% of respondents in 1991/92 and 1996/97 interviewing periods and from 85 to 92% in the following years) that focusing on language forms is indispensible, that those forms must be explained in details and thoroughly trained, and all the more so the earlier the stage of learning is and the lower the students' level is. All the respondents (100%) agree that both the communicative approach and the approach focused on language forms are required in teaching/learning English but they are sure that the former approach can be introduced only when learners have already acquired a substantial vocabulary and the majority of grammar forms (88% of respondents in 1991/92 interviewing, 82% in 1996/97 interviewing, and from 79 to 85% of respondents in the following years).

Therefore, the majority of respondents are interested in and attracted by one thing (to acquire communication skills through communicative learning activities) but believed that for achieving their learning goals they must do a different thing (to practice language forms). That is why they are totally unprepared to accept learning with no focusing on language forms (like in Krashen's approach, 1982) or without learning grammar separately (like in Lewis's Lexical Approach, 2002). And it is worthy of note that students persist in those attitudes even today, 23 years after our first interviewing in 1991/1992. This attitude is demonstrated by the figures above (from 79 to 85% of respondents) and in everyday's teaching and learning process at the *Center*.

The students' choice of methods of language teaching based on language form focusing is not really surprising. It has been said in the *Introduction* that just such, in most cases, were the methods used for teaching them foreign languages in their previous language learning experience. So, they often have no idea of any other methods, and other approaches to teaching and learning seem impossible or inefficient to them.

In view of the above facts, the principle of taking into account learners' attitudes to the ways and methods of teaching and learning English stipulates that in the conditions under consideration we cannot start with purely communicative language learning which seems unacceptable to students at the very beginning of their language studies. We should start with focusing on language forms, gradually introducing communicative learning activities and negotiating with students the transition to them until they finally oust the language form-focused activities.

It is the approach long ago suggested by Nunan (1988) and some other authors (like Green, 1993). Following it, we have developed the so called "communicative-analytic method" to be the basic one for teaching at our *Center*. Among the nine courses that are included in the program, the first very short (two month-long) preparatory introductory course of English pronunciation for total beginners is mostly analytical in nature since it is focused on explaining and training English pronunciation patterns and some fundamental grammatical forms (e.g. the verbs "to be" and "to have", the imperative mood, etc.). But even in this course not less than a quarter of time in class is devoted to communicative learning activities aimed at students' acquiring some elementary communicative skills (see in the list of courses above). On the basis of just such activities, the teacher tries to show students how much faster and more efficiently they can achieve their goals (e.g. to start speaking English) in communication than in language form-focused exercises.

This allows designing the second course in the program—the beginner's course of oral communication in English—as the one in which communicative learning activities aimed at developing learners' skills of speaking and listening are fully balanced with language form-focused learning activities (50% by 50%). Beginning with the pre-intermediate level course, communicative learning activities start to dominate in the learning process (three quarters of all class time), and from the intermediate course they occupy almost all of it.

That does not mean that in the courses on the intermediate and advanced levels of General English and in the ESP courses focusing learners' attention on language forms is totally excluded. That would be a bad choice in view of the ideas concerning foreign language teaching in the conditions of absence of target language communicative environment (cf. Doughty & Williams, 1998; Ellis, 1990; Fotos, 1994). However on more advanced levels of language teaching and learning limited processing of language forms is organized not by way of explicitly explaining the rules concerning those forms and their intensive practicing but by way of using the so called *consciousness-raising* approach (Rutherford, 1987), i.e. by attracting learners' attention to some language forms with comparing them to some other forms of the same language (not the students' mother tongue) and with reinforcing them in communication.

Another characteristic feature of the developed *communicative-analytic method* is the introduction of *experiential learning activities* (Freeman & Freeman, 1994; Jerald & Clark, 1994; Kolb, 1984;

Tarnopolsky, 2012) as soon as students become capable of participating in more or less sophisticated forms of communicative language learning. Experiential learning activities in language teaching model extra-linguistic reality. They ensure that students experience their personal functioning in that modeled reality using the target language for such functioning. Thereby, communication skills are subconsciously constructed by students themselves in the process of quasi-genuine experience and communication. This subconscious construction intensifies and facilitates acquisition thanks to the fact of its being subconscious and, therefore, practically effortless. Acquisition comes as the outcome of learners' experiencing direct participation in target language communication.

Experiential learning activities include:

(1) Role playing in the target language;

(2) Simulating professional situations in the target language (in ESP courses);

(3) Brainstorming some problematic issue(s) in the target language;

(4) Case studies concerning some problematic issues and done in the target language;

(5) Discussions of some problematic issues conducted in the target language;

(6) Students' presentations on some issues delivered in the target language;

(7) Students' search for extra-linguistic information through target language sources (Internet, audio, audio-visual, and printed ones). That search is undertaken for finding some particular information required for doing some creative learning assignments;

(8) Writing papers in the target language (like essays, reports, memos, articles, letters, etc.) on the basis of the information that students have discussed orally and found during their information search;

(9) Project work (when students do learning projects using the target language for doing such projects).

Just these forms of communicative learning activities gradually become more and more used beginning from the intermediate level course and dominate among all the kinds of learning activities in ESP courses.

The third characteristic feature of the developed *communicative-analytic method* is taking into account students' attitudes to using their mother tongue (L1) in the process of learning English. In the interviewing sessions there have been no specific questions about it, but our learning process has demonstrated that at the early stages of acquiring English adult students cannot even imagine how their L1 can be avoided by the teacher for giving explanations, organizing their work, and rendering clear the meanings of new vocabulary items. Their attitude to teacher's attempts to introduce the "English only" environment in the classroom has always been very negative. That is why it was considered wiser to follow the approach long ago advocated by Atkinson (1987) according to which at the early stages of learning students' L1 should be used for the purposes of explaining and organizing. But with every next step in students' advance in language acquisition, the area where L1 is used should become narrower and narrower, so that, by the start of the intermediate course, there should be no place for L1 in the teaching/learning process at all.

The first two principles discussed above regulate what courses should be included into a commercial English language teaching program and how such courses should be taught. But they do not help much in formulating the particular goals of every course, selecting its learning contents, determining its duration, etc. This is the function of the third basic principle suggested by us.

4. The principle of every course's autonomy and completeness combined with the unity of all courses in the program

This principle, just like the two others discussed further in the article, was formulated not on the basis of potential/enrolled learners' special interviewing (like the first two principles) but thanks to observing the teaching/learning process and analyzing students' statements and remarks made in the course of their studies, as well as their explicitly expressed wishes and requirements.

Quite soon after our *Center* had started functioning, it became clear that far from all the students advanced consecutively from the lowest level course to the ones of the higher levels. Depending on their personal objectives and their initial level of English, they could attend only the first beginner's/elementary course of oral communication in English and not continue their studies after that if they needed English just for a short visit abroad. Other learners, who had developed the elementary level of English earlier and wanted to improve it, came to study only in the pre-intermediate and intermediate level classes. The third category included the initially more advanced students who wanted to get trained for taking an international examination. There also were those who were interested in taking one of the ESP courses only, etc.

All such students wanted every course they attended to be fully autonomous, which means their being self-sufficient, structurally, organizationally, and informationally complete, with quite explicit and logical objectives that learners could fully comprehend. Learners expected clear understanding of what they would be able to do in English after finishing the course. The learning contents of each individual course must also be autonomous and complete in full correspondence with the well-defined course objectives. For instance, if the above mentioned beginner's course of oral communication in English has as its principal objective preparing students for a short visit abroad, learners want to understand clearly in what situations they will be able to communicate orally in English, and they may be satisfied only if they see that the learning contents cover all basic situations inevitable on such a visit (like going through the passport and customs control on arrival, finding the way in a foreign city, using city transport, checking in at a hotel, eating out, shopping, etc.). Learners insist on this way of designing commercial courses of English because they often plan to attend just one course and are eager to obtain more or less definite and complete learning results at the end of their studies—having those results well-defined for themselves at their beginning. Besides, it was demonstrated in our teaching/learning process that learners do not want any of the courses to last longer than one academic year and often may discontinue their attendance otherwise. Therefore, students want to have their courses autonomous and complete even in what concerns the time limits (one academic year and not longer).

In this way, the principle under consideration regulates the formulation of every course's particular objectives, the selection of learning contents for it, and even the organizational aspect as to the overall duration of each of the courses. It is following this principle that all the courses in our program were designed with the exception of the first one—the short preparatory introductory course of English pronunciation for total beginners. Unlike all the other courses, that one is not autonomous and complete at all. It only constitutes a preparatory (introductory) part to the beginner's/elementary course of oral communication in English, and students are always enrolled for both those courses together. It is their joint duration that makes exactly one academic year. The reason why the introductory course was structurally separated from the beginner's course was the above mentioned necessity of negotiating with the students during the preparatory period the transition to more communicative forms of teaching and learning.

On the other hand, the principle under discussion regulates one more aspect. Though all courses should be autonomous and complete, they cannot be totally independent of each other. There are students, and not too few of them, who want and need to advance consecutively from course to course. And this requires that all the courses are designed so as to continue each other and be interconnected as well as interdependent in their objectives and learning contents (in methods of teaching too). So, the principle in question also demands that the formulation of courses' objectives and

the selection of learning contents for them are interdependent. For instance, the vocabulary introduced in the intermediate level course should be based upon and take into account the vocabulary learned by the students in the pre-intermediate level course; it should also make the foundation for the introduction of vocabulary in the more advanced courses. This second aspect of the principle under discussion helps to make the formulation of objectives and selection of contents more precise.

The next two principles, also developed by way of observing what really happens in the teaching/learning process, are auxiliary to the first three ones giving some additional guidelines as to how teaching and learning should be organized. It is interesting to note that the two principles below, formulated only on the basis of classroom realities, are in some contradictions to what students often say when they speak about how their learning should be organized. The reasons for this will be discussed further.

5. The principle of limited intensiveness of the teaching/learning process

When the courses of English started to be developed by us in the early 90s, they were designed as intensive ones because intensive foreign language teaching and learning was very popular at that time after the works by Losanov (cf. Bancroft, 1978). In accordance with the practice of intensive language teaching, four class periods per week in every course were planned, with four academic hours for every class period (45 min in one academic hour). The duration of each of the courses was not longer than 3 or 4 months. At that time, all the enrolled students welcomed such an arrangement saying that it was much more convenient for them to study the language intensively for four months and "be done with it" at least for a while than to devote a whole year to such studies.

However, when classes practically began, after the second or third week, attendance started falling dramatically. Not infrequently instead of ten learners in the group two or three were present during one particular class period (different people during different class periods). The students explained their absence by problems at work or at home, by being too busy to come to class, or simply by excessive tiredness. As a result, there were practically no positive learning outcomes visible either to the students or to the teacher. Thus, what the learners claimed at the beginning of their studies contradicted the reality of their class attendance. That, in its turn, led to our change of policy and restructuring courses which were made "*limitedly intensive*". This change encouraged the formulation and introduction of "*the principle of limited intensiveness*" of English language studies at commercial schools and centers.

In practice, it means that there cannot be less than two class periods per week with two academic hours per period. The minimum class time of four hours per week was chosen due to the already quoted data by Strevens (1977) according to which there absolutely cannot be less for obtaining positive results. The maximum class time per week was empirically determined as two class periods of three academic hours each—six class hours per week. If the number of class hours per week increased even to eight, attendance started falling. As a result, the first four courses in the program (see the list of courses above in part 2 of this article) were structured as having *two two-hour class periods per week*. The last five courses were structured as having *two three-hour class periods per week*, and all the courses lasted (and continue to last) one academic year each.

6. The principle of avoiding hometasks

This next principle was advanced just like the preceding one—on the basis of practical experience only and in some contradiction to what the students claimed. At the beginning of their studies, they usually claim that they want hometasks to accelerate their language acquisition. However, when they do receive them in their English classes, most frequently they do not do them out of class—again, just like in the preceding case, explaining their negligence by problems at work, by being too busy, or simply by fatigue.

This phenomenon was observed for a number of years when hometasks were neglected by the absolute majority of adult learners. As a result, learning outcomes suffered because the part of the learning contents planned for hometasks remained unprocessed by students. This led to a decision not to rely on hometasks at all in what concerns the processing of learning contents, to avoid them altogether, advising learners, who said they wanted them, to recapitulate, revise, and "recycle" what was done in the last class and the classes preceding it.

7. The principle of introducing culture into teaching/learning English

This last principle, unlike all the others, was advanced not on the basis of analysis of students' claims and statements but on the basis of examining one specific negative feature in the most spread and common teaching/learning practice characteristic of commercial language courses in Ukraine. This feature is very little target culture in that practice with all teachers and students' efforts concentrated only on the target language and communication in it. The teachers from commercial language schools and centers in Dnipropetrovsk (15 persons) whom we asked in 2012 why it was so unanimously answered that, first, they had no time for culture studies having so much to teach in the courses that were not too long and, second, that their students had never asked them to teach the target culture—only the language and how to communicate in it.

The second reason seems quite plausible from what we have observed in our own experience. Adult students at commercial language schools and centers in Ukraine most often do not even suspect how *culturally different* communication is in different speech communities and how important the realization of that difference is for achieving communicative success (Alptekin, 1993; Byram, 1997). But this is very well realized in the modern theory of language education that places *sociolinguistic competence* (Council of Europe's, 2001) factually at the head of all the components of communicative competence that foreign language learners must develop. It is also recognized that the culture to be taught to such learners should not be the culture with a big "C" (literature, art, laws, political systems, etc.) but the culture with a small "c"—forms of behavior reflected in everyday communication and making it socially acceptable (Corbett, 1999; Killick, 1999; Tarnopolsky, 2001). That is why the first reason given by the teachers for not teaching culture is not valid—time and place for teaching it must be found, however short is the commercial course. It is so because teaching culture is not less (if not more) important than teaching the language.

Some authors have become so enthusiastic about teaching culture in foreign language studies that they even started to oppose the intercultural approach to communicative language learning. From the end of the first decade in the 2000s it has become fashionable to speak about the "the post-communicative era" in foreign language education (cf. "Symposium on grammar teaching in the post-communicative era"—Burkert, Mumford, & Lackman, 2010—as the name for one of the symposia held at the IATEFL 2009 Cardiff Conference). Communicative language learning (CLL) started to be regarded as a thing of the past—something to be replaced with the intercultural approach (IA): a kind of training allowing students to communicate in English efficiently with representatives of different cultures without breaking the socio-cultural norms characteristic of a given culture and in this way attaining communicators' specific pragmatic goals (Ferradas, 2010). CLL is beginning to be considered as all the more outdated because teaching English as a foreign/second language is more and more distancing itself from the idea that students should be taught either British English or American English as the two most widely spread varieties of the language that has become the universally accepted media of global communication. After Kachru's (1986) work on World Englishes, the movement advocating teaching English as an International Language (EIL) or English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) is gathering momentum (Graddol, 2006; Jenkins, 2004), gradually ousting CLL.

On the other hand, in the discussion of Tarnopolsky (2010) vs. Berry (2011) and vs. Young (2011) on the pages of the three issues (217, 219, and 220) of *IATEFL Voices*, it was argued that the line of thinking behind the assertion that the IA, EIL, and ELF can oust CLL is methodologically incorrect. It is nothing better than the result of misinterpretation because if CLL is responsible for *the method of*

teaching (how the language is taught), IA, EIL, and ELF are responsible for *the selection of teaching/learning contents* (what is taught in a language course) (Tarnopolsky, 2010). That is why CLL, being indifferent to the content, not only does not form an opposition to IA, EIL, and ELF, but may very well complement them (Tarnopolsky, 2010, 2011).

This conclusion was very important for us because it creates an opportunity of making our communicative-analytic method *culturally-oriented.* It must be made culturally-oriented without fail because, otherwise, those who have learned their English at commercial language schools and centers will not be able to use it abroad effectively, however well they know it. They may adequately use it linguistically in communication but inadequately socio-culturally which will not infrequently lead to communicative failures. Therefore, the language training must be combined with the cultural training from the very beginning—in our conditions, from the very first short preparatory introductory course (see again the list of courses above in part 2 of the article). Even there, when introducing some elementary communicative formulas, students' attention should be focused on their cultural connotations (e.g. why in English only a highly optimistic answer is expected to the question "*How are you?*" and never a pessimistic one which is quite possible in learners' home culture).

The principle discussed above may be not be required for organizing commercial language courses in countries where there is a well-developed and established tradition of teaching culture in indissoluble unity with teaching language and communication in it. In such countries the principle in question is implemented in all situations of language teaching, including commercial courses, so there is no need to emphasize it specially. But it absolutely must be emphasized when teaching English commercially in such a country as Ukraine where the tradition of teaching culture has not been formed as yet. So, in the latter case, it may be considered as a specific principle for Ukrainian conditions. It was the last founding principle on which the development of all the courses of English taught at our *Center* was based and it is on the foundation of all these six principles that they continue their functioning today.

8. Discussion of the suggested principles' potential in improving the teaching/learning process

Discussing the significance of the suggested principles and their potential for improving the teaching/learning process at commercial English language schools and centers, it should be stated that it is just these principles that allow our *Center* to move ahead with the times.

For instance, following the principle of developing English courses on the basis of learners' needs and interests made us add in early 2000s a number of courses for training students to get them prepared for international examinations in English. Following the same principle, a course of English for Psychologists was added in 2013 (see above in the article).

The principle of taking into account learners' attitudes to the methods of teaching English necessitated (since 2011) introducing computer technology, like computer language learning programs, Internet search on sites in English, etc., into English studies at the *Center.* Now, beginning from the intermediate level course, such technologies are used in all courses. Their introduction was stimulated by students' clearly expressed interest in learning English with computers, as well as the advances in this particular aspect of language teaching and learning (Warschauer, 2002).

The principle of introducing culture into teaching and learning English makes us reinforce the cultural component in every course in the program (beginning with the most elementary first two courses) according to today's approaches to the importance of cultural constituent in language acquisition.

The principle of avoiding hometasks stimulates the development of learning activities that help make maximum use of in-class time for optimal development of students' communicative skills, so

that the absence of home tasks does not impede learners' progress. A good example is project tasks that are one of the central activities in both ESP courses in the program.

The principle of every course's autonomy and completeness combined with the unity of all courses in the program requires constant improvements of interconnections between courses. Those improvements are done in such a way that, without infringing on the autonomy and completeness of every separate course, each of them becomes more based on the preceding one and forms the basis for the following one.

Finally, the principle of limited intensiveness of the teaching/learning process urges teachers to introduce such methods of teaching/learning that help students achieve optimal results in limited time and with limited duration of this or that course. The experiential learning activities discussed above in part 3 of the article are mostly used for this purpose.

9. Conclusion

Six principles of teaching English to adults at commercial language schools and centers have been presented in this article:

(1) The principle of developing English courses on the basis of learners' needs and interests;

(2) The principle of taking into account learners' attitudes to the methods of teaching English;

(3) The principle of every course's autonomy and completeness combined with the unity of all courses in the program;

(4) The principle of limited intensiveness of the teaching/learning process;

(5) The principle of avoiding hometasks;

(6) The principle of introducing culture into teaching/learning English.

These principles were developed on the basis of what learners themselves said they wanted and needed, on the basis of the teaching practice and observations of the teaching/learning process which, sometimes, contradicted the learners' explicit statements, and, finally, on the basis of analysis of practical and theoretical information. The principles were not developed all at once but gradually added one to the other to form, in the end, a single system. As a result, when all of them together were put into practice making the foundation for all the English courses developed in the language *Center* described in this article, the situation with those courses radically changed for the better. Students and teachers became quite satisfied with the learning outcomes, students' attendance stabilized, and the teaching/learning process became quite successful remaining successful and fully approved by the students and teachers for more than 15 years already.

What may be no less important is the fact that the suggested principles allow the *Center* discussed in the paper to keep abreast of current trends in teaching English as a foreign language to adults. In the preceding section of this article it has already been said that those principles help in broadly introducing IT technologies, experiential learning activities, and cultural studies into the courses included in the program. But there are, at least, two other aspects that should be mentioned. First, for some years already our students have been expressing growing interest in learning not only British English but also other varieties of it, especially American English. This, on the basis of the first of our principles, made us introduce two varieties of the English language into intermediate and advanced courses being taught: the British and the American ones (cf. Tarnopolsky, 2005), as well as elements of what is now known as International English and ELF (Graddol, 2006; Jenkins, 2004). Second, the constructivist approach to teaching English for professional purposes (Jonassen, 1995; Tarnopolsky, 2012), which is the very latest trend in ESP, has become the basis for designing both of our ESP courses—the one designed for learning Business English and the one designed for psychologists. It was done following the requirements of all the first five principles: to meet the students needs and their interests in learning professional English in conditions modeling professional activities and

professional communication in the target language (the first two principles); to make ESP courses more autonomous and complete (the third principle) since the constructivist approach presupposes such courses' autonomy and completeness; to intensify class work without using hometasks, which is also characteristic of the constructivist approach and corresponds to the fourth and fifth of our principles. Other examples may be given but even those that are cited in this paragraph are sufficient for demonstrating one more beneficial aspect of the suggested set of principles.

All this gives grounds for recommending the suggested principles to be considered by organizers of commercial teaching of English to adults in different countries. Additional information and detailed description of some of the underpinnings underlying the approach suggested in this article and not discussed in it can be found in other author's works quoted in References section.

Author details
Oleg Tarnopolsky[1]
E-mail: otarnopolsky@mail.ru
[1] Department of Applied Linguistics and Methods in Foreign Language Teaching, Alfred Nobel University, Golovposhtamt, Abonentska Skrynka 856, Dnipropetrovsk 49000, Ukraine.

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Appendix

Interviewing questions used since 1991 and until 2015 when interviewing potential and enrolled students at the commercial language *Center*

(*in the process of interviewing the questions are asked in Ukrainian or Russian*)

(1) Are you interested in acquiring skills in all the four basic forms of communication in English (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) or only in some of them? Which exactly? What courses on language and communication skills would you like to see in the English teaching program?

(2) If you are interested in acquiring skills in several basic forms of communication in English in which sequence would you prefer to acquire them or do you believe they should be all acquired simultaneously?

(3) Are you interested in acquiring skills in General English or English for professional communication (English for Science and Technology, Business English, English for Medicine, etc.), or both of them? If you are interested in acquiring skills in English for professional communication, say what exact kind of English for professional communication is important for you and in what sequence would you prefer learning it: after General English, before General English, without learning General English at all.

(4) How many levels of English courses should there be: numerous levels (beginner's/elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, and advanced ones) or one or two levels are sufficient? Which ones? What do you think about the levels in courses of English for professional communication? Is one level enough or there should be several of them? Which ones? What do you believe your own level of English is?

(5) How do you believe it is better to learn a foreign language—in communication only or by the way of focusing on language forms and practicing them?

(6) Are both approaches necessary in language learning and which of them should dominate, if any?

(7) "What learning activities from the list that I have given you are the most attractive and interesting for you (the list included ten communicative learning activities, such as role plays, discussion, project work, etc., and ten examples of language-focused exercises)?"

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