ACQUIRING ESP EXPERIENTIALLY: A CASE FOR TEACHING ENGLISH FOR PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES TO TERTIARY STUDENTS MAJORING IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the essence of experiential method that makes the most important part of the constructivist approach to teaching English for specific/professional purposes (ESP) to tertiary students majoring in Tourism and Hospitality at Ukrainian universities. It is demonstrated that the experiential method is based not on conscious learning but on subconscious acquisition by students of communicative target language skills – the effect that is achieved through gamification of learning activities. The cooperative / collaborative nature of acquisition / learning activities belonging to the experiential method is also emphasized. Blended (off-line / on-line) learning is discussed as an important constituent of experiential teaching / learning process. A number of experiential acquisition / learning activities are analyzed in the article. Those activities include: role plays and simulations, brainstorming, case-studies, and discussions, students' target language presentations, writing assignments (writing essays, reports, summaries, abstracts, even articles in the target language), project work, and the Internet search with the aim of finding information required for doing creative experiential tasks. A part of the article is devoted to giving examples of such activities as represented in the experiential coursebook "Tourism and Hospitality Industry Matters" developed by the authors. All through the article the orientation of language studies at students' future profession is emphasized. The paper is concluded with stressing the positive effect that the suggested experiential method, used as a practical way of implementing the constructivist approach in ESL studies, produces both on the target language learning outcomes and on the development of students' ESL learning motivation.

Keywords: constructivism, experiential method, ESP, cooperation / collaboration for better target language acquisition, blended learning.

Introduction

As tourism industry is becoming one of the most profitable and cost-effective branches of the majority of national economies, the quality of training future specialists in this particular sphere is becoming of utmost importance now. One of the most essential prerequisites for training real professionals in tourism is ensuring their achievement of a high level of command of at least one foreign language. High-quality foreign (English) language training requires, first of all, a high-quality coursebook developed specifically for university target language studies directed particularly at teaching English for specific/professional purposes (ESP) and, even more specifically, at teaching it only to those students who major in a certain sphere (in our case,

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Tourism and Hospitality). It is proceeding from these assumptions that a new coursebook "*Tourism and Hospitality Industry Matters*" (2018) has been developed and successfully tested by us in teaching practice. The coursebook has been innovatively designed on the basis of the constructivist approach to ESP teaching or, even more exactly, on the basis of the experiential method of target language acquisition, this method and learning activities belonging to it being the practical implementation of the constructivist approach in foreign language studies.

The goal of this article is the analysis of the approach and method indicated above and, more specifically, the kinds of learning activities on which the method is based as manifested in the developed coursebook "*Hospitality Tourism and Industry Matters*" (2018).

The constructivist approach to foreign language teaching and the experiential method as practical embodiment of the approach

According to Tarnopolsky (2018), *constructivism* is such a theoretical approach to teaching foreign languages that provides for students' own autonomous development ("construction") of their target language knowledge and target language communication skills. This is achieved through learning activities that model the genuine target language communication, thus making the learners involuntarily acquire the knowledge of the target language system and the skills of using that system in human verbal intercourse. In the framework of the constructivist approach, gaining command of the target language system and the skills of successfully using it in communication is mostly subconscious – not through deliberate and purposeful learning but, according to Krashen (1982), through subconscious *acquisition* when all the elements of the target language system and the skills of fluently using them in the intercourse are mastered in and through virtual communication. The latter is organized in the language classroom to faithfully model the genuine one that takes place in the target language and cultural community.

Such modeling of target language communication in the foreign – English – language classroom, when teaching that language for professional purposes (ESP) at higher schools, as it is in our case, is based on imitating students' future professional activities and professional communication, both being implemented in the language to be acquired. This makes that language the means, the instrument of such implementation which is conducive to its involuntary subconscious acquisition just because of its use as a permanently employed instrument.

The way of making such employment a regular and even constant feature of the teaching practice is the *experiential method*, specifically developed to bring real-life experience (hence the name experiential method) into the classroom, including the foreign language classroom (Kohonen, Jaatinen, Kaikkonen, Lehtovaara, 2014; Kolb, 1984).

The experiential method may be said to be based on three basic constituents that make it harmonized, ready and totally adapted for efficient practical use. The first is *gamification* (M. Herger, 2014), the second is *learners' cooperation/collaboration* (Kessler, 1992), and the third is *blended learning* (Sharma, Barrett, 2007). Each of them should better be discussed separately.

Gamification as a constituent of the experiential method

Gamification is using game technologies for solving non-game tasks, or, otherwise, solving real problems with the help of game elements and technologies (Werbach, Hunter, 2012). In fact, all learning activities that are most representative of the experiential method are to a greater or lesser extent based on games, and it is just gaming on which learners' attention is focused that makes language learning mostly subconscious turning it into acquisition (see above). The gaming activities belonging to the experiential method include:

1. *Role plays and simulations* (the former, when used in ESP teaching, meaning modeling target language communication of professional and non-professional people, such as the intercourse of a lawyer with a client; the latter meaning modeling target language professional communication of professionals with professionals, such as the intercourse of engineers discussing and solving some production problem at the factory where they work). Both these kinds of activities are games even by their definition.

2. *Brainstorming, case-studies, and discussions* are also gaming activities because, when students talk about professional matters and problems while doing such activities, they create a virtual (game) model of professional reality where brainstorming, case-studies and discussions are used to solve genuine professional problems and not the ones "invented" for ESP teaching. So, in fact, students are gaming when they are trying to solve them – without any real results for their future profession. The difference between brainstorming and case studies is that, while some professional problem is being brainstormed, the important thing is not to solve it but to formulate theoretically as many ideas as possible concerning the ways of its solution. In a case-study, the solution of such a problem is purely practical and based on hard facts, so that the ideas formulated in brainstorming can be tested as to their practical value and those that do not pass the "practicality test" can be discarded. Thus, case-studies should always follow brainstorming as a means of testing the formulated ideas concerning possible solutions. Discussions should follow both brainstorming and case-studies because in discussions the ideas that have been formulated in brainstorming and have passed the practicality test in case-studies are discussed theoretically to decide whether they can theoretically be accepted as solutions for an entire group or class of professional problems, the samples of which were practically handled in case-studies.

3. The same in what concerns the gaming character of learning activities may be said about students' *presentations* in the target language. They are "gaming" (virtual) professional presentations not influencing in any way the genuine professional activities. Such presentations are often a kind of end-piece for other experiential activities outlined above and generalizing or summarizing the results of those activities or of students' own research done on professional target language information sources (see below about blended learning).

4. This generalizing or summarizing nature is to even greater extent a characteristic feature of all *writing activities* done within the experiential paradigm. Those activities are also a kind of gamification due to the same reasons that make brainstorming, case-studies, discussions, and presentations experiential games. But when students write professionally oriented essays, summaries, abstracts, reports, and even short articles, they summarize and generalize what they

have done in their oral activities and what they have found while researching target language professional sources (see again about blended learning below) much more thoroughly and in much greater details. Thus, learners' own acquisition/learning results are reinforced. Where such writings are of special importance is project work (Fried-Booth, 1996) which is the crowning learning activity for the experiential method as a whole.

5. *Project work* is an all embracing multi-aspect game covering the entire teaching/learning process and lasting at least several weeks, if not the entire semester or an academic year. When students are doing their learning project, a group of learners is required to complete it. For instance, they may be asked to prepare a professional brochure on some imaginary equipment manufactured by their imaginary company. For preparing such a brochure, they need to find a lot of information, discuss it with their partners, write parts of the brochure and present them, compile the final variant of the brochure, etc. As a result, all kinds of experiential activities are enacted in sequence, all kinds of communicative activities (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) are used in harmony, and the final product (the brochure in our case) is produced as the result of the entire game.

It can be seen from what was said above that the experiential method requires students to join their learning efforts which is provided for by the cooperative/collaborative nature of the experiential acquisition/learning paradigm.

Learners' cooperation/collaboration as a constituent of the experiential method

From the very description of the experiential acquisition/learning activities given above it is clearly seen that they can be performed only when students join their efforts and work together in pairs or groups. It concerns not only role plays and simulations, brainstorming, case studies, discussions, and project work. Even presentations and writing activities require learners' joint efforts for implementation, though the tasks themselves may be prepared individually. Presentations are not just passively listened to but are also commented, criticized, and discussed by students-listeners with conclusions drawn for use when completing further tasks of professional content. Writing tasks in the framework of the experiential method are always completed as a *process writing* procedure (White, Arndt, 1991): first the ideas for writing and the outlay of the piece to be written are brainstormed, discussed, and outlined by a group of students; then, the first draft is written individually, but that draft is peer-reviewed and peer-commented by other students; on the basis of such comments, the draft may be rewritten (the second draft), etc. Thus, group or team work is present even in such an individualized learning activity as foreign language writing.

Therefore, the experiential method requires constant learners' *interaction*, i.e. is *interactive* (Long, 1977) in its very nature. This permanent interaction in the target language is achieved through providing for students' constant work in pairs and small groups which makes their learning *cooperative* (Kessler, 1992) – wheren common results are achieved by common efforts with mutual help and support aimed at successfully completing the learning tasks and jointly attaining the learning goals. Such cooperative learning in the process of its application in

language studies gradually becomes *collaborative*, with the responsibility for the learning outcomes shifted from the teacher to the students and the latter ones becoming truly autonomous in their learning efforts – in this way making the full use of one of the most important advantages of the experiential method: the development of *learners' autonomy* (Holec, 1981) in acquisition of knowledge and skills.

Blended learning as a constituent of the experiential method
The experiential acquisition/learning activities done cooperatively/collaboratively are always highly creative, as can be seen even from their description above. That is why to complete them successfully in ESP classes, learners need a lot of professional information, which, quite naturally, should be obtained only from target language professional written and oral sources to develop students' target language reading and listening skills. Equally naturally, such information in the language to be learned (English) cannot be fully supplied by the students' coursebooks or printed and audio resources in English that are in stock at the university foreign language department or library – there are too few of them there. The only solution is finding such information (both in written and oral representation) on the Internet which is an inexhaustible source of it.

Taking into account the fact that creative experiential learning tasks permeate all the ESL teaching/learning process advocated in this article, searching the Internet for finding professional information in English required for doing such tasks becomes an absolute everyday necessity. As a result, Internet searches have to be not only regular but also very frequent. They should also be done not only out-of-class but in-class as well and be even included as separate tasks in ESL coursebooks. This regular and frequent inclusion of Internet search into the ESL teaching/learning process makes that process *blended* (Sharma, Barrett, 2007) with the off-line and on-line components being of equal importance for the final success of ESL teaching and learning.

Everything said above about the three basic constituents of the experiential method substantiates in theory the use of that method in ESL teaching practice. What remains to be considered in this article are the practical illustrations of our theoretical assumptions by giving examples of practical experiential acquisition/learning activities as they are used in ESL classes for university students of English majoring in *Tourism and Hospitality*.

Practical examples of experiential acquisition/learning activities
All the examples below are taken from our coursebook specially developed for students majoring in *Tourism and Hospitality* (Tarnopolsky, Kozhushko, et al., 2018, p. 20, 14, 33, 91, 17 – the order of pages corresponds to the order of examples given below). The examples are not commented upon since their features discussed in this article are clearly observable from the instructions to activities. Finally, it should be noted that the examples illustrate all those activities that have been mentioned in the article.
Example 1 of a role-play/simulation:

Role-play a conversation between a representative of a tour operator from Greece and a retail travel agent from Ukraine. The agent is ready to book a tour (beach holiday) in the Greek island of Crete for ten Ukrainian tourists. Discuss the price, length of the tour, dates, accommodations, possible excursions during the holiday, meals, etc. Agree on the commission for the agent.

Example 2 of brainstorming:

Professionals in the field of tourism are most broadly divided into tour operators and travel agents. How would you formulate what each of them does? Try to define the jobs of a tour operator and travel agent in the most concise, comprehensive, and scientific manner and speak about their functions. Brainstorm and define the similarities and differences of these two basic professions in tourism ... in ... groups of three or four students.

Example 3 of a case-study and a presentation:

Divide the class into two groups: A and B. Each group should read attentively their case (case A or case B) .... After reading your case, discuss in your group what kind of tour should be suggested to the tourist(s) in that case and write down your suggestions. ... When you finish compiling your offer, hand it in to the students from the other group. They should first read the case of the group whose offer was given to them, then read and discuss the offer and, finally, decide whether they would buy the suggested tour if they were the tourist(s) from the case. Why yes or why not? When they take their decision, they should make a two or three-minute presentation on that decision and the reasons for it. In this way, the work finishes with each of the two group's presentation on their decision concerning the tour offer of the other group.

Example 4 of a discussion and a presentation:

The picture above shows a family on a tour. In your idea, what types of tourists exist? Discuss this in groups of three or four students (you have ten minutes for discussion). After the group discussion, one student from each of the groups will be requested to make a short presentation of the conclusions made (not more than three minutes for every presentation; not more than 15 minutes for all the presentations with questions to presenters).

Example 5 of a writing activity and Internet search:

Use the text about water-based transportation in tourism and some additional Internet search for writing a 150-180-word report to the director of your travel agency suggesting that your agency starts promoting sea and river cruises as one of the principal directions of your activities.

Example 6 of a project task:

At home, you will need to work in the same small groups that you were working in during the class time. Develop (in writing) the seventh part of your travel agency's prospectus. This part will need to be not less than 250-300 words. State what thermal and mineral water spas and international centres of medical tourism your travel agency specializes in and recommends to your tourists, what kinds of travel insurance you recommend that your clients get and will provide for them through insurance agencies-your partners. Give information about those partners and why you have chosen them. After writing this part, print it on the computer and illustrate as well as you can. Print out several copies to use in the next class and get ready to

present this completed part of the project to your class-mates and listen to their critiques and criticisms.

Example 7 of Internet search task:

Find on the Internet some information in English on advantages of working as a travel agent in comparison with the job of a tour operator. You may ask your teacher to supply some appropriate sites or work independently using some search engines. Use this information in your essay, too.

The examples given above seem to be sufficient to demonstrate the experiential acquisition/learning activities in their practical use when teaching English for professional purposes to students majoring in *Tourism and Hospitality*. Those examples clearly illustrate the gamified nature of the activities in question, their interactive cooperative/collaborative character, and the blended features in the organization of the teaching/learning process. Such practical examples allow to draw some final conclusions from everything said in the article.

Conclusion

The coursebook "*Tourism and Hospitality Industry Matters*" from which the above examples of experiential acquisition/learning activities have been borrowed has not been used in the ESL teaching practice for long, being published only at the beginning of 2018, and, most certainly, a special experimental study (planned for the near future) is required to unequivocally establish what its influence on students' learning outcomes is. But even the short teaching practice, together with our practice of teaching English to students of other majors (future economists, psychologists, pedagogues) using the coursebooks developed by us and designed similarly and on identical principles, demonstrates that this influence is more than highly positive. The positive effect is observable not only in the rapid development of learners' efficient skills in professional target language communication. Not less observable is the growth of students' learning motivation. The latter advantage of the suggested approach is not surprising because: 1) students learn English in the situations of gaming which is always attractive to young people; 2) they do it cooperatively/collaboratively helping and supporting one another; 3) the Internet, in which today's youngsters are used to spending with pleasure a great part of their time, becomes a substantial constituent of their language learning process; 4) target language learning is inextricably linked to students' future profession, so that students see its immediate usefulness for their professional development. All these favorable and even beneficial features of the suggested experiential method used as a practical way of implementing the constructivist approach in ESL studies make it worthy of further development and spread in teaching English for professional development to university students.

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