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## Introduction

English Language Teaching is an enormously dynamic, extensive and varied research discipline, underpinned by one fundamental question: how best to meet the needs of our learners and teachers, especially in our increasingly globalised and technologized world. The papers included in this special volume of *ELOPE* reflect this. While it may seem at first glance that they have little in common, all of the contributions are similar in sharing research important for classroom practice, reporting on addressing flaws in the curriculum, implementing appropriate teacher training techniques or learning strategies, all with the aim of developing the skills our learners need to be able to negotiate the challenges they face inside and outside the classroom.

As Melita Kukovec, from the Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor, claims in her paper “Human Rights Education in Foreign Language Learning,” one of the greatest challenges our learners face is living in a world in which human rights violations are commonplace. She identifies the need for the full implementation of HRE (Human Rights Education) in Slovene schools at all levels of education, arguing that the foreign language classroom provides the ideal setting for this education to take place, proposing this as a solution to the rising levels of violence and intolerance in Slovenia and elsewhere. As a teacher trainer, Kukovec is particularly interested in how to prepare future teachers for the vital role they will play in HRE, and outlines some of the strategies that have been implemented at her own institution to develop the necessary skills, paying particular attention to tasks aimed at raising critical awareness.

The need to critically engage with society is also strongly reflected in the paper “Social Ills of (Global) Capitalism under Scrutiny in American Literature Classes: ‘Teaching to Transgress’” by Lilijana Burcar, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. Burcar uses American literary texts, such as Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, to develop critical literacy among her students so that they gain an understanding of how the mechanisms of institutional patriarchy and racism are key to capitalist social relations. In calling for a return to the use of socially engaged texts, Burcar challenges the dominant post-modernist approach. The value of this engagement becomes evident when considering how her students begin to use the critical skills they have honed in such a way to reflect on their own society. Using the example of the refugee crisis, Burcar describes how her students were able to counterbalance the “stigmatising discourse” surrounding this issue, perpetuated by the media and state institutions, and see the wider racial mechanisms at play.

Critical thinking is also at the heart of the paper “Debate in the EFL Classroom” by Mirjana Želježič, this time in combination with communicative competence. Želježič makes a compelling case for the use of debate in the EFL classroom, arguing that it is the ideal vehicle for developing these two vital skills (describing CT as the main educational goal and CC as the most important

goal of the communicative paradigm). As Želježić points out in her paper, CEFR demands both critical thinking and communicative competence at the B2+ level, describing a speaker who can express an opinion on a complex topic and argue for it. This, she argues, is debating; however, she very carefully defines what communicative competence actually means, identifying a gap in current EFL practice. Želježić claims that what is being taught in schools is oral production rather than oral interaction. Drawing on sociocultural theories of language, she points out that language is a social and cultural phenomenon, which only exists in interaction with others, and which is not reflected by the predominant individual-student-centred pedagogical practices of teaching (and assessment) employed at present.

Intercultural competence, an aspect of EFL that has garnered increased attention in recent years, is the subject of the work by Ana Petravić *Međukulturna kompetencija u nastavi stranih jezika. Od teorijskih koncepata do primjene (Intercultural Competence in Foreign Language Teaching: From Theoretical Concepts to Applications)*, reviewed by Janez Skela of the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. Skela provides a detailed overview of Petravić's work, guiding the reader through the concepts and ideas she presents. He points out the relevance of her work, discussing how Petrović clarifies some of the confusing terminology surrounding this issue, how she details the evolution of intercultural competence and its impact on classroom practice, and outlines some of the key theoretical models which have informed intercultural education. Skela is also at pains to stress the importance of Petravić's work, how it reflects the importance of teaching intercultural competence in our ever internationalised and globalised world, meaning that it cannot be simply compartmentalised but must be placed at the very heart of language education. What also comes across most clearly from Skela's review is that Petrović is an author and expert that we can trust, and that her work is one that is of use to anyone who has an interest in intercultural education and language teaching.

As well as the broader competences we wish to develop in our learners as teachers of English as a foreign language, we are also committed to guiding our students to accurate and effective language use. Two papers, both from Croatia, present insightful and highly relevant research into language acquisition among learners of English as a foreign language. In the paper "A Longitudinal Study of the Acquisition of Verbal Morphology in the EFL Classroom," the author Mirjana Semren, from the Department of English Language and Literature, University of Split, discusses the results of a research project in which the order of acquisition of grammatical morphemes and verb tenses was studied in the interlanguage of Grade 6, 7 and 8 Croatian learners. Despite some criticism of morpheme studies, the author believes that it still has much to contribute to SLA research, and sets out to complement the existing body of work with her own results. While presenting her conclusions, the author draws our attention to the implications the work has for classroom practice and to particular interest to other researchers who may embark on a similar study. She also indicates the potential for future research to clarify some of their findings, considering, for example, the impact of affect, extending the length of the study, and limiting the number of participants.

The second paper focusing on language acquisition is "Croatian EFL Learners' Interlanguage Requests: A Focus on Request Modification" by Danijela Šegedin Borovina, from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Split. This paper presents research on pragmatic competence, specifically how it develops in the interlanguage of Croatian learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) at various levels of proficiency. The focus is placed on request modification and the use of internal and external supportive moves within it. The results of this

study, which indicated that learners demonstrated little pragmalinguistic development, carry implications for future classroom practice, as the authors suggest, more should be done in EFL classrooms in Croatia to address this issue.

Classroom practice, in particular using English as the language of instruction, is also thoughtfully addressed in “Students’ Attitudes towards the Use of Slovene as L1 in Teaching and Learning of Business English at Tertiary Level” by Nataša Gajšt, Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Maribor. Gajšt states in her paper that while research on monolingual instruction is extensive in “general” English, it has been largely neglected in English for Special Purposes. She therefore carried out a study among her own students in an attempt to begin to redress this imbalance, testing primarily to what extent her learners believe English should be used in their language classes. The results she reports are highly relevant for ESP practitioners, as defining the contexts in which monolingual instruction is appropriate has clear implications for ESP methodology.

The papers in this special edition of ELOPE present a wide range of research, from strategies for guiding our learners to think critically and argue their perspective, training them in engaging with others respectfully and with empathy, encouraging them to uncover the covert mechanisms at work in our capitalist system, to exploring aspects of their language acquisition, and considering the subsequent implications for classroom practice. Yet, while they may differ in focus, they all reflect the one unchanging concern that lies at the core of EFL research – how best to address our learners’ and teachers’ needs, and to equip them with the tools to fully function as competent English users and educators in the contemporary world.