

Innovation in Foreign Language Acquisition: Involving Students in Real-Life Projects

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The present study is analyzing the work of 5 students and their two tutors (the author of the article and a colleague in English language) in preparing tasks for a Competition in Applied Linguistics in French and English for High-Schoolers, at New Bulgarian University in Sofia, Bulgaria. Students had varying levels in French language and a steady B2 level across all semesters (2nd and 4th) in English. They all had Bulgarian as a mother tongue.

The aim of the Competition was to create links with high school students as possible prospective students for the Bachelor degree in Applied foreign languages for Administration and Management; to present the university and the possible professional outcomes for future students through a simulation of professional tasks to carry out.

The methodology used is closely related to the concepts of inverted or flipped classroom, project-based learning, cooperative and collaborative learning. The students were encouraged first to think about possible real-life tasks to give to the participants in the Competition. They chose three tasks: translation of commercial slogans; professional correspondence and machine translation post-editing (MTPE). For each of the three tasks, they chose samples on their own, on which they reflected and had to choose the most suitable for the task. After this they designed criteria for evaluation and carried out the assessment of the works themselves, once the competition was over. They were quite unanimous while assessing the works of the participants. During the awards ceremony, they discussed the results and presented, anonymously, parts of the participants' works in order to showcase best practices.

The results from the experiment were three well-designed tasks aimed at the aforementioned professional situations. During the stage of designing the tasks, the students had the opportunity to interact with each other and to build their own teams, which helped them in acquiring further skills in interpersonal communication and problem-solving. They had to improve their translation skills, their skills in researching information on the Web and their critical thinking. Overall, the tasks they created show a greater maturity in understanding key concepts of interlingual translation and conception of professional tasks.

The study's limitations were the small group of students; the few languages they spoke; the few tasks they managed to propose. In the future, the Competition may be extended to include a greater variety of languages as well as a more varied group of students in terms of language acquisition, so that the project has greater impact.

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