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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHER AND LEARNER LINGUISTIC COMPETENCES

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the relationship between foreign language teacher (FL) and learner linguistic competences. While the assessment of FL learner linguistic competences is very common, assessing FL teachers is rather a controversial topic. Although there are some studies into FL teacher linguistic competences, their use in the classroom and their effect on learner language achievements are rarely studied. However, such studies would provide significant feedback to FL policy makers and teacher educators so as to ensure the quality and the success of FLL. Our research study, therefore, sought to assess English language learner linguistic achievements in connection to their teacher linguistic competences in the Croatian context. The research drew upon the data collected within the longitudinal and transnational project *Early Language Learning in Europe* (ELLiE). The study sample consisted of two generalist teachers who teach lower primary English in two small-town primary schools and four of their learners respectively. Over the first four years of FLL we carried out qualitative analysis of teacher linguistic competences based on classroom observations and teacher interviews. The interaction task, carried out at the end of the fourth year of English language learning, enabled, on the other hand, the qualitative and quantitative analysis of learner oral production. The results obtained were compared and the relationship between teacher and learner linguistic competences was established. The results of the study indicated that teacher linguistic competences, prompt the development of learner linguistic competences.

Key words: FL teacher linguistic competence, early foreign language learning, FL learner language achievements, FL teaching in Croatia

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1. Introduction

Foreign language learning (FLL) has become one of the most important modules of many school curricula worldwide. Moreover, it has been advocated that the earlier the start in FLL, the better overall learner outcomes. For this reason in most European countries children start FLL at lower primary school levels. In order to guarantee that learners benefit from an earlier start, foreign language (FL) policy makers require from FL teachers a number of different skills and competences. Linguistic competences are one of such components that constitute FL teacher knowledge base. They are equally important and closely interrelated with every other component of FL teacher knowledge. However, as opposed to other competences, especially methodological and pedagogical, FL teacher linguistic competences and their influence on foreign language teaching (FLT) are rarely studied independently. Considering the importance of learner development of FL communicative skills in today's globalized world and that in many FLL contexts teacher represents the principal target language (TL) model, special attention should be brought to teacher use of TL in the classroom. Moreover, establishing the relationship between FL teacher linguistic competences and FL learner achievements can provide a valuable feedback to FL policy makers and teacher educators.

With this in mind, the present thesis sets out to determine how Croatian English language teacher linguistic competences interact with their young learner achievements during the first four years of English language instruction at school. The thesis is divided into two major parts. The following three chapters set up a theoretical basis for better understanding the basic concepts and to give insight into the latest research findings relevant to FL teacher and learner linguistic competences. In order to know which linguistic requirements are set upon young FL learners and their teachers in the first four years of FL instruction, the second chapter deals with European and Croatian FL policies. The third

chapter deals with how FL teacher education prepares future and practicing teachers to meet the requirements prescribed by FL policies. The fourth chapter reports on classroom research findings in the field of FL teacher linguistic competences and their effect on FL teaching and learning. The fifth chapter is the second major part of this paper - it is a report on our research study into Croatian English language teacher linguistic competences', and their effect on young learner achievements during the first four years of FL teaching and learning. The research study draws on the data obtained within the project called *Early Language Learning in Europe* (ELLiE) which later on will also be discussed more in detail.

2. Teacher and learner linguistic competences in FL policies

Much research carried out in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) at an early age suggests that an earlier start in second language instruction has a positive impact on learner's future overall language achievements (Kovačević, 1993; Mihaljević Djigunović, 2001; Vilke, 1993). For this reason most European countries, including Croatia, have implemented national language policies that require from primary school learners to start FL learning from the first grade (age 6 to 7) or from the fourth grade (age 10 to 11) at the latest. Along with the age limit, language policy documents also define the minimum language achievements that learners should reach at different stages of FL learning. As a guideline for this, most policies, both within and beyond Europe, rely on the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001). The CEFR, developed by the Council of Europe between 1989 and 1996, provides guidelines for FL learning, teaching and assessing by dividing FL learner proficiency into six reference levels with a corresponding descriptions. *The Croatian National Curriculum* (Fuchs, Vican & Milanović, 2011) in part relies on the CEFR in establishing a linguistic threshold that Croatian young learners have to reach by the end of the fourth grade in primary schools, that is, A1 level. According to the CEFR, learners with the A1 proficiency level are basic breakthrough users who are able to:

(...) understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce themselves and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 24).

The Curriculum states that Croatian young learners will most likely surpass the expected A1 level achievements in English due to great outside-classroom exposure to this language (Fuchs, et al, p. 80). Furthermore, even though the CEFR describes the expected achievements in the four skills, in the first four years of FL learning, Croatia places a particular stress on oral and aural skills, rather than reading and writing. For this reason, Croatian FL teachers are expected to adopt multisensory and holistic approach in their teaching.

Besides the CEFR, the Council of Europe also introduced the *European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages* (EPOSTL) (2007), an innovative, self-assessment instrument intended for student teachers of FLs. The EPOSTL defines pedagogical and didactic competences necessary for development of learner communicative and general competences, as described in the CEFR, and helps students reflect critically on them. It consists of 196 taxonomic descriptors of competences related to seven educational domains: context (of learning and teaching), methodology, resources, lesson planning, conducting a lesson, independent learning and assessment of learning. When it comes to FL teacher linguistic competences, they are only partially tackled within the domain of conducting a lesson, which includes interaction with learners and classroom language. The descriptors of competences within each domain reveal the EPOSTL's close relation to the CEFR. The descriptors of minimum linguistic competence for teachers correspond, for example, to the CEFR's descriptors of learner B2 proficiency level. Similarly, Croatian FL policies require a minimum competency at B2 level for generalist teachers with a qualification to teach primary English (GTPPrimEng) and a minimum C1 level with some elements of C2 for specialist teachers.

In Croatia, there is also another important document that specifies in more detail FL teacher competences, especially linguistic ones, necessary in primary school teaching. The document designed as a part of *Tempus* project, *Competences of Primary School Foreign*

Language Teachers in the Republic of Croatia (Bagarić, Pavičić Takač, & Radišić, 2007), defines FL teacher subject-specific and pedagogical competences. Despite the fact that communicative or linguistic competences are equally important components of teacher competences as methodology, for the purpose of our study, we will report only on teacher subject-specific competences as described in this document. According to the authors, teacher language-specific competences include two subcategories: communicative language competences and teaching language theory. Communicative language competences are divided into linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences. Linguistic competences are furthermore subdivided into phonological, grammatical, lexical and semantic competences and imply that the teacher has the necessary knowledge of FL prosodic features, spelling, vocabulary, grammar and semantics.

As we have seen, different FL policy documents have tried to define what FL teachers and learners should know at different stages of FL teaching and learning. However, putting the prescribed guidelines into practice is not an easy task, especially considering that FL teaching and learning conditions vary a lot and in many contexts they are far from being ideal. It has also been noted that FL teacher linguistic competences, as defined in FL policies, are usually equalized with general FL proficiency. However, considering that FL teacher uses language for much more specific purposes, general proficiency standards, as defined in the CEFR, are not enough. Another important issue that policies seem to ignore is how to ensure the quality of teacher education programmes in a way that they guarantee teacher development of prescribed skills. *The European Profile for Language Teacher Education* (Grenfell & Kelly, 2004) is one of the documents that offer a clear and comprehensive outline of desirable FL teacher education in Europe. It has been developed by a wide range of European experts and draws on the practical experience of eleven European education

institutions. However, it is not a mandatory set of rules but rather a voluntary frame of work for policy makers and language teacher educators.

In the following chapter we will discuss more in detail European and Croatian FL teacher education in order to see whether it provides enough opportunities for FL teachers to acquire FL teacher competences, especially linguistic ones, as prescribed in FL policies. In doing so, we will also look into FL teacher attitudes towards their education. Special attention will be drawn to student and practicing teachers in Croatia and their opportunities for pre-service and in-service training. It is of relevance to our study to establish what the general outcomes of Croatian FL teacher education are since learner success largely depends on their teacher's both linguistic and methodological skills.

3. Teacher linguistic competences in FL teacher education

Ever since communicative language teaching (CLT) has become widely promoted and accepted as the most efficient teaching method, more pressure has been put on teachers to use English more fluently, naturally and spontaneously in the classroom. For this reason a significant number of FL teachers, especially those in primary and secondary schools, have a tendency to give primacy to the development of linguistic competences over methodology. We will report on several studies carried out with regard to this issue, especially in Croatia, and we will investigate how teacher linguistic competences are developed within teacher education.

3.1. Teacher attitudes towards linguistic competences in FLT

Several studies have been carried out into Croatian student and practicing English language teachers' evaluation of the importance of different categories of FL teaching competences. For example, a study into student teachers at the University of Zagreb revealed that they, as opposed to practicing teachers, evaluated communication skills as significantly more important than methodological knowledge. This could be due to the structure of the students' university programme which contained more philological courses at the time (Mihaljević Djigunović & Zergollern Miletić, 2003). Similarly, a study conducted with English student teachers at the University of Zadar showed that the development of communicative (linguistic) was ranked very high, whereas teaching skills had a very low ranking (Čurković Kalebić, 2006). Furthermore, in Mardešić's study (2011) student teachers from three Croatian universities and their mentors participated in the evaluation of the students' success in giving a lesson. The results again showed that both groups of participants considered linguistic competences and the quality of interaction with pupils, rather than the

use of teaching methods, as the major indicator of student success in teaching. However, when the Croatian teacher education programme changed and more hours of teaching practice, along with a larger number of specialized FL teaching courses, were included, both student and teacher attitudes changed. Thus, Mardešić & Vičević (2013) reported that both students and teachers had become more aware of the importance of methodology, as both groups found it equally important as interaction and linguistic competences.

Research has also shown that not only are student and practicing teachers concerned about achieving high levels of linguistic competence, but they also feel a need for further training of language skills. For instance, research into personal attitudes of Croatian GTPPrimEng showed that the participants considered it very important to reach native-like command of TL lexis and grammar so as to provide good language models for their pupils. At the same time the participants ranked precisely these language aspects as the most difficult and problematic areas of their TL knowledge (Cergol Kovačević & Mikulec, 2013). Similarly, Richards' and Roberts' study (2008) revealed that the great majority of trainee French teachers in the UK also expressed concerns about their knowledge of grammar, lexis and orthography. Such findings suggest that assessment for learning in teacher education is necessary just as much as pre and in-service training of linguistic skills.

Furthermore, some research findings suggest that FL teachers participate in FLT programmes in order to improve first their language skills, and then their methodology. For example, research into in-service teaching improvement courses in Britain showed that Korean teachers' participation was primarily of personal importance to them rather than professional. Even though participants gave some importance to learning methodological skills, they generally felt that the most beneficial aspect of the programme for them is the possibility to establish and maintain contact with native speakers. Moreover, informal post-course contact with the teachers suggested that, as they felt that their English had improved

since their participation in the programme, they started to use more English in their classrooms and to interact with their pupils (Lavender, 2002). A similar study into two groups of Polish secondary school teachers participating in an in-service programme within inner-circle countries also reported that teachers' prime motivation to participate was language improvement rather than methodology. The author attributed this finding to teachers' limited access to English outside the classroom and few opportunities to travel (Barry, 1990).

Some researchers claim that teacher need for language improvement stems from other issues rather than their lack of proficiency. On the basis of his study, Barry reports that the insufficient proficiency that teachers feel is "quite possibly more a problem of perception than of fact, and that it is their confidence rather than their proficiency that needs bolstering" (1990, p. 64). In the same line, Kamhi-Stein (2009) reports that FL teacher may experience identity issues, especially when abroad, because students in language institutes often prefer a native-speaker as a teacher, despite the fact that they may be less qualified and less experienced than a non-native-speaker. Feelings of anxiety and inadequacy are also present when teachers themselves question their language competence. For example, Murdoch (1994) reports that those teacher who conceive themselves to be weak in TL, doubt both their teaching ability and professional legitimacy. Conversely, a study which examined the efficacy beliefs of English language teachers in Turkey indicated that the more proficient teachers perceived themselves to be across the four basic skills, the more efficacious they felt (Yilmaz, 2011).

To summarize, there is no easy way to determine whether low self-confidence negatively influences teacher linguistic performance, or if insufficient linguistic competence produces low self-confidence which then results in an unsatisfactory performance. The fact is that FLT programmes should contain both methodological and language improvement components so as to ensure the development of all teacher competences and thus guarantee

teacher sense of professionalism. In the following subchapter we will look at the content of different pre-service and in-service FLT programmes in order to see to what extent they pay attention to the development of teacher linguistic competences.

3.2. Development of teacher linguistic competences in FLT programmes

Even though the findings from the studies into teacher attitudes towards their linguistic competences, as reported above, imply that FLT programmes should pay more attention to language improvement, this is not the case. The majority of FLT programmes tend to concentrate only on improving the teacher's methodological competences (Cullen, 1994, p. 162). Some programmes combine classroom skills training with improving language awareness or with teaching how language operates but they ignore the importance of teacher's use of language (Cullen, 1994, p. 162). Different approaches have been proposed in order to address this issue. Some researchers link the language component to the methodology, so that teachers practice the language skills needed to implement particular classroom teaching strategies (Cullen, 1994). In this way, language proficiency is linked to classroom teaching and to carrying out specific instructional tasks. Furthermore, Cullen (2002) goes one step further and suggests a model for in-service training in which language improvement would have a central role and from which classroom skills and language awareness would eventually arise.

Regardless of the ever-growing need for communicatively competent teachers, much of the aforementioned suggestions for improving FLT programmes have not been put into practice. A sufficiently intensive language improvement programme would take substantial amounts of time and resources to develop, and therefore it is not an easy task to implement. Nonetheless, the importance of giving more priority to language component in FLT programmes becomes more obvious not only when examining teacher attitudes towards this

issue but also when looking at their practice. Not only can teacher linguistic inadequacy negatively affect their self-confidence and sense of professionalism, but it can also prevent teachers from implementing their methodological skills, which in turn can hinder learner progress. In the following chapter, we will look at some classroom research findings that precisely tackle these issues. We will also discuss what definitions of teacher linguistic competences stem from classroom research findings, and in what ways teacher linguistic competences can be assessed.

4. Classroom research of teacher linguistic competences

4.1. Teacher language proficiency impact on FL teaching and learning

While there has been much research into different teaching practices and their effect on young learners, insufficient attention has been given to teacher language proficiency and its interaction with other aspects of teaching and learning. Moreover, FLT programmes, as we have seen, usually disregard language proficiency as an equally important teaching variable as methodology. If we consider that in Croatia, for instance, FL student teachers are expected to have achieved the CEFR's C2 proficiency level by the end of their graduate studies, which implies that they have a full mastery of English language, further linguistically-oriented trainings would, indeed, seem unnecessary. However, challenging this concept would be controversial for institutions that award teacher with the diploma and, at the same time, threatening towards teacher's personal and professional integrity. Nonetheless, several studies have shown that inadequate teacher linguistic skills negatively affect their practice and learner achievements.

Medgyes (2001) reports that teacher's lack of FL proficiency is responsible for their dependence on teaching materials and the lack of improvisational teaching. Moreover, a study into South African student teachers of English in their final year of studies, and their primary school learners, showed that there was a high correlation between teacher and learner proficiency levels. Analysis of the written tasks of both groups showed that teacher's language errors related to pronunciation, grammar, syntax and spelling, mostly based on a negative L1 transfer, were adopted by their learners. An interesting fact is that student teachers qualified their proficiency as sufficient for successful FL teaching when the qualitative study of their proficiency showed that it was rather poor (Müller & Nel, 2010).

Similarly, another study reported that the poor oral communication skills of secondary school English language teachers in China, in combination with other factors such as inadequate teaching materials and methods and poor TL exposure, resulted in learners having ongoing difficulty communicating, even after six years of learning (Shih, 1987).

When it comes to the European context, there have been few studies that examine the relationship between teacher and learner linguistic competences. However, the studies we have managed to find mostly report on the positive influences of teacher linguistic competences on their learners. For example, a research into Croatian pre-puberty learners showed that they successfully mastered the English phonetic system because their teachers provided good models to imitate (Vilke, 1993). Similarly, the data obtained from a study into Croatian first graders showed that they reached a considerably high standard of pronunciation because their teacher persistently insisted on precise and accurate pronunciation of English sounds. Moreover, the study reported that, if the teacher insisted on the creative use of communicative patterns in classroom activities, learners' utterances were found to be more unpredictable, that is, language was used as a means of real communication (Kovačević, 1993). One of the latest studies in the European context that also tackled the issue of teacher linguistic competences and learner achievements is the project *Early Language Learning in Europe* (ELLiE) (Enever, 2011). This longitudinal and transnational research project is of special interest to our study since our research draws on the data collected within it.

The ELLiE was initiated in 2006 and was completed in 2010. It focused on evaluating the success of English language teaching in primary schools in different European countries in order to provide guidelines for future educational policies, both inside and outside of Europe. The project researchers claimed that the success of early SLA depended on a number of different factors, particularly the teacher's skills and out-of-school exposure to TL. It included schools in which an obligatory start of FL instruction for children is seven years old, at the

latest. The project revealed that not all schools respected European educational policy which expects that all early primary FL teachers possess a high level of fluency, preferably at C2 level according to the CEFR, and age-appropriate methodology skills. Moreover, Croatia was the only country reported to provide enough in-service and pre-service training in early primary FLT. However, the research results showed that successful FLL still took place in all of the countries and was achieved in very different ways. For example, the ELLiE study showed that, regardless of teacher linguistic competency that ranged from B1 to near-native level, successful language learning was possible due to other factors, such as positive attitudes, rich outside-classroom exposure to TL, motivation and so on. The project also showed that in Croatia teachers are generally well qualified either as generalists specialized in the FL or as specialists.

Considering that the ELLiE study showed that young FL learners in Europe are generally successful, it is not surprising that there are so few studies that deal with teacher linguistic competences and its impact on learner achievements. Our study review suggests that such research has been carried out mostly in countries where FL learners are rather unsuccessful and where outside-classroom exposure to TL is so low that teacher constitutes a very important factor in FLL. To ensure the quality of FLT, such countries also impose pre-service assessment of teacher methodological and language-specific skills. An insight into such practices, especially with regard to language-specific skills, will enable us to gain a broader image of what constitutes FL teacher linguistic competences, apart from general proficiency in TL language.

4.2. Redefinition of teacher linguistic competences and their assessment

Besides being a very controversial topic for reasons explained earlier, the most problematic issue about the assessment of teacher linguistic competences is that they are

difficult to determine. As we have mentioned before, FL educational policies define teacher linguistic threshold levels by relying only on the CEFR. However, when it comes to FLT, teacher's necessary linguistic competences are much broader and more specific from those described in the CEFR. The CEFR's descriptors of competence are only general guidelines given for assessing any FL learner and not the FL teacher in particular. Therefore, some authors have proposed a redefinition of the features that constitute language-specific competences for teachers. Most recently, Richards (2011) outlines twelve language-specific competences that a FL teacher needs in order to teach effectively: 1) competence to provide good language models; 2) to maintain use of the target language in the classroom; 3) to maintain fluent use of the target language; 4) to give explanations and instructions in the target language; 5) to provide examples of words and grammatical structures and give accurate explanations (e.g. of vocabulary); 6) to use appropriate classroom language; 7) to select target-language resources (e.g. newspapers, magazines, internet websites); 8) to monitor his or her own speech and writing for accuracy; 9) to give correct feedback on learner language; and 10) competence to provide input at an appropriate level of difficulty. Similarly, Sešek (2005) looks into functions of teacher talk and suggests that teacher language is a source of input and model language use as well as a tool for managing classroom processes. Therefore, she argues that teacher language is a case of language for specific purposes. In line with Richards and Sešek, Bondi (1999) also proposes language-specific skills required from FL teachers other than general language proficiency. With primary school teachers of English in mind, she elaborated *A Language Profile for the FL Primary Language Teacher* (Bondi, 1999), which singles out the following areas of linguistic competences that teachers should develop:

- 1) language skills at level B1;

- 2) knowledge of language structure and use in the contexts of classroom management;
- 3) knowledge of language for professional self-development; and
- 4) language awareness.

On the basis of this analysis, Bondi and Poppi devised a Certificate of English for Primary Teachers (CEPT) (2007) meant to assess primary school teacher competences so as to improve FL teacher education programmes in Italy. This language certificate is expected to become the official qualification needed by any primary school teacher to start teaching English in local state schools.

Other countries worldwide, especially those faced with declining standards of teacher and learner linguistic skills, have also felt the need to introduce FL proficiency assessment for teachers. Thus, Consolo (2009) proposed *An Examination of FL Proficiency for Teacher* (EPPLE) to be used in the Brazilian context. EPPLE's assessment criteria are defined by means of researching the characteristics of the language produced by future and practicing teachers. These include the four basic linguistic skills - reading, writing, listening and speaking. However, task types for each of these linguistic domains, unlike those in regular proficiency tests such as IELTS or TOEFL, reflect tasks that are likely to be demanded from teachers. For example, written tasks include writing questions for a reading comprehension activity and to make corrections in student texts. For the moment EPPLE's results are not used as criteria for entering teaching practice, but they serve for improving the quality of teacher education, especially with regards to language development. In Hong Kong, however, the Government has introduced obligatory language proficiency test (LPAT) (Lin, 2007) that all graduated English language teachers have to pass before starting to work in primary or secondary schools. LPAT consists of formal tests in the four skills and of direct classroom language assessment which takes into account teacher language of instruction and interaction.

Regardless of the controversial implications of assessing FL teacher linguistic competences, all of above-mentioned practices reinforce the idea that FL teacher linguistic competences are much broader than it is normally thought. Teachers use TL in classroom which means that, apart from general proficiency in the four skills, they need to develop special language skills for classroom management, classroom interaction and classroom instruction. However, there are some authors of FL teacher proficiency tests that disagree. Thus, the Language Australia-LTRC tests, developed by Elder and her team (1993), assess general language skills of Asian languages teachers without considering the use of TL in classroom. Elder explains that:

This will ensure that ability estimates for candidates demonstrating high levels of language proficiency will not be unduly influenced by failure to act out the teacher's role effectively in the test situation. But this amounts to a weakening of the test's claim to specificity. If information about general language proficiency is enough, why bother with measurement of classroom-specific competence? (1993, p. 97).

Elder's final remark leads us to the much discussed issue of whether teaching competence is superior or inferior to linguistic ability for FL teachers. Elder's view that teaching competence is secondary to the linguistic one is also reinforced by Briguglio and Kirkpatrick as they state that:

It is comparatively easy, and takes a much shorter time, to provide someone with language teaching skills, especially if they are already trained teachers. It takes much longer and is much more arduous to equip the same person with high levels of linguistic proficiency in a language other than English. (1996, p. 35)

Such attitudes, however, seem to trivialise teaching skills and imply that teacher high level of linguistic competence automatically guarantees effective teaching, which is not necessarily the case (Canagarajah, 1999). Moreover, many authors claim that content knowledge and

pedagogy are equally significant components of FL teacher skills. For example, Shulman states that:

The key to distinguishing the knowledge base of teaching lies at the intersection of content and pedagogy, in the capacity of a teacher to transform the content knowledge he or she possesses into forms that are pedagogically powerful and yet adaptive to the variations in ability and background presented by the students. (1987, p. 15)

Although the knowledge base of FL teacher is still subject to discussion, our literature review permits us to conclude that FL teacher profile should contain suitable TL knowledge, the knowledge about the TL and pedagogical and methodological knowledge. Pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes should foster the development of these competences whereas teachers should be made aware of the importance of continuous professional development. Studies have also shown that inadequate teacher linguistic competences, especially if combined with other factors such as limited outside-classroom exposure to TL, can have serious implications for the outcomes of FLL. Assessment of student and practicing teacher linguistic competences can provide helpful feedback for improving teacher education and assuring the quality of FLT. Moreover, as Richards suggests, communicative skill and TL competence, although intricately interconnected in practice with other major areas of a FL teacher knowledge base, can and should be separated for the purposes of research (1998). Our research study reports precisely on these areas of FL teacher knowledge.

5. Research study

5.1. Aims

The aim of the present research study is to evaluate FL teacher linguistic competences and compare them to learner linguistic achievements. We have centred our attention on primary school teachers and learners, and their performance in the first four years of FLL. We have organized and summarized our main goals into several points:

- 1) evaluation of primary school teachers' oral fluency and other language-specific competences required from FL teachers;
- 2) evaluation of learners' English language achievements at the end of the fourth year of primary school FLL;
- 3) exploring the relationship between learner language achievements and teacher TL use in the classroom; and
- 4) establishing the features of teacher linguistic behaviour that may have prompted or hindered the development of learner communicative competence.

With these aims in mind, we have developed several hypotheses about the possible outcomes of our study:

- 1) teacher language-specific competences, if used fluently, accurately and purposefully in the classroom, will have a positive effect on the development of learner communicative competence;
- 2) if frequent, teacher's lexico-grammatical mistakes will be reflected in learner's mistakes;
- 3) the greater the use of TL in the classroom, the better the development of learner communicative competence; and

- 4) the excessive use of L1 in the classroom will hinder the development of learner communicative competence.

5.2. Sample

For the purpose of our study, we have decided, on the basis of the data obtained within the ELLiE project, to choose two primary schools with a very similar background in terms of school setting, in and out-of-school learning environment and learner profile. Since the main aim of our study concerns FL teacher as the principal factor in successful FLL, the selection of two very similar learning contexts helps us exclude to some extent the influence of other, non-teacher related factors on the outcomes of FLL. Furthermore, according to their teaching qualifications, one teacher (focal teacher) and four learners of their choice (focal learners) have been selected from each school to participate in the study. In the following subchapters you can find a more detailed description of the selected school, teacher and learner profiles.

5.2.1 School profiles

Our study involves two primary schools, which we will name School X and School Y, each of them situated in a small city in the western part of Croatia. School X introduced early FLL in 2000, whereas School Y had offered it long before it was introduced as compulsory for grade 1 in 2003. Apart from geographic position, the two schools share many common characteristics. Both of them are well-equipped (CD players, computer room, library) and their principals have positive attitudes towards early FLL. Their pupils are mainly local children who mostly have not studied FLs before entering the school at the age of six or seven. English classes are held two times per week for 45 minutes in both schools. Pupils have a significant out-of-school exposure to English. Even though pupils from larger Croatian cities are exposed more to English in the streets, restaurants and shops, pupils from our small-

town schools can still benefit from non-dubbed and subtitled TV programmes in English, both on the national TV channels and satellite channels. Moreover, it has been reported that the parents have positive attitudes towards FLL, which suggests that pupils are probably encouraged by their parents to practice FLs at home. One class from each of the schools has been selected for further analysis in our study. The class from School X is comprised of 25 pupils whereas School Y counts 24 pupils. However, only four focal learners from each school have participated in the communicative competence task carried out at the end of the fourth year.

5.2.2 Teacher profiles

The two teachers of the above mentioned classes share the same educational background, but differ significantly in age and experience. The data obtained from teacher interviews has enabled us to summarize their profiles as followed: (Note: Teacher X is the teacher from School X, and whereas Teacher Y is the teacher from School Y)

	Teacher X	Teacher Y
Teaching qualifications and age	Generalist teachers with a qualification to teach primary English, age 37	Generalist teacher with a qualification to teach primary English, age 24
Teaching experience	7 years of teaching experience in lower primary school	1.5 years of teaching experience in lower primary school
Teacher's FL competence	Minimum B2 level according to the CEFR's descriptors	Minimum B2 level according to the CEFR's descriptors
Teacher's use of TL in classroom	Cannot tell, but she balances well the use of TL and L1	50%
Materials	Course book, flashcards, CD-player, extra materials not available at school: cut-outs, posters, realia	Course book, flashcards, CD-player, Internet, extra materials not available at school: cut-outs

Most frequent activities	Games, songs and chants	Games, songs, cutting up, colouring
Attitudes towards teaching English to young learners	Prefers older learners	Positive
Difficulties in teaching English to young learners	Long and demanding preparations, physically exhausting	Classroom management – discipline problems
Opinion about received training	Adequate	Adequate and practical
Training attended over last 3 years	Teacher seminars whenever available	None (Note: Teacher obtained her degree only 1,5 year ago so the training she has had is a teaching practice organised by the university)

Table 1. Teacher profiles

Teacher X has been teaching the same class during all the four years of FLL. However, Teacher Y has been absent on several occasions during the year 3 and 4, when the class had two other substitute teachers. Although we do not have any background information on them, we will take into account two available classroom recordings of one substitute teacher when discussing School Y results.

5.3. Instruments and procedure

In order to describe and evaluate teacher and learner linguistic competences, we have used several instruments: 1) teacher questionnaires and interviews (see Appendix I, II and III), 2) classroom observations and recordings; 3) the interaction task for learners (see Appendix IV). Please note, we did not participate personally in the development or distribution of these instruments. We namely used, for the purpose of our study, the data already obtained within the ELLiE project. The project researchers developed the questionnaires, carried out the classroom observations and made the tape recordings.

5.3.1. Teacher questionnaires and interviews

Teacher questionnaires were used as a basis for an interview held by one of the ELLiE researchers with the focal teachers in the first, the second and the fourth year of primary school FLL. The first-year questionnaire consisted of five general questions about teacher age, education and experience. In addition to this, there were another twenty open-ended and four close-ended questions concerning teacher attitudes towards teaching English to young learners (TEYL), their opinion about the adequacy of their pedagogical and language skills as well as their use of classroom activities and materials. The questionnaire also included enquiries about learner progress and their parents' attitudes towards English language learning. Drawing on the information from the first-year interview, we have established focal teachers' profiles (see Table 1). The second-year questionnaire consisted of seventeen open-ended questions about learner progress, attitudes and difficulties in learning English in comparison to the previous year. Some of the questions also referred to the learner's out-of-school exposure to English, such as their use of digital media at home. The third-year questionnaire, although existing within the ELLiE project, was not available at the moment of our data selection and, therefore, we lack teachers' feedback for this year. The fourth year questionnaire was rather short (four questions only), enquiring mainly about the learner and parent attitudes towards learning English and about difficulties in teaching English at this level.

5.3.2. Classroom observations and recordings

Apart from teacher questionnaires, another instrument that served for data collection was an audio tape recorder used not only during teacher interviews but also during classroom

observations and the interaction task with learners. The tape recordings made during classroom observations constitute the core of our investigation of teacher linguistic performance in class. In the scope of four years, the total of twelve tape recordings was made in our target classrooms, more precisely, six recordings in each classroom. The ELLiE researchers, who personally attended and recorded the classes, also provided some extra information based on their classroom observations to complement the classroom recordings. This information concerned: 1) the number of students in class, 2) the furniture arrangement, 3) teacher non-verbal communication with pupils (eye-contact, moving around the classroom), 4) the most frequent classroom activities, 5) the approximate percentage of TL use in class (based on the observation chart with time reference or their own notes), and 6) teacher's error correction. The researchers' reports on the last three points are of special interest to our study since these points give us significant feedback on the focal teachers' language use in the classroom. This information will be revisited when discussing the results of the study.

In order to assess focal teacher linguistic competences, we have relied on FL policy documents discussed in Chapter 2 and the measures used in the special instruments for assessment of FL teacher linguistic skills that we have mentioned earlier (CEPT, LPAT). Drawing upon these sources, we have come to establish the four main language-specific categories required from primary school teacher that will serve us as guidance through classroom recordings and for teacher assessment. Some of the categories are followed by a short explanation in brackets which illustrate what specific aspects of classroom language are precisely being looked at. The categories are as followed:

- 1) Pronunciation and prosody;
- 2) Grammatical and lexical accuracy and range (range in terms of modified input);

- 3) Language of interaction (eliciting, questioning, responding, providing feedback, turn-taking, disciplining); and
- 4) Language of instruction (presenting, giving instructions, giving explanation, error correction, setting homework)

The first two categories concentrate on teacher oral fluency since FL teachers, especially in early FLL, should provide good language models for their pupils. The categories three and four have to do with classroom management skills. Even though these skills are normally considered to be a part of teacher's pedagogical rather than linguistic knowledge, it has to be noted that it is essential to be linguistically proficient in order to manage successfully daily classroom activities in FL and learners benefit from this kind of input. As Sešek explains:

A teacher in any subject uses language as the primary tool of classroom management; to organize daily classroom activities, explain, give feedback, discipline, motivate, encourage, correct etc. It is in carrying out these specific communicative tasks that language teachers have the opportunity to provide error-free, meaningful, structured and fine-tuned input in the target language (2005, p. 225).

Therefore, we will look at teacher classroom language and we will try to determine whether it is fluent and successfully maintained as a means of interaction and instruction. By looking at teacher classroom language, we will also establish to what extent TL is used in the classroom.

The above mentioned categories will serve us to describe more effectively each of the focal teachers' use of TL, to compare them and to establish the characteristics of classroom language that can hinder or prompt learner language achievements at the end of the fourth year of FLL. However, we have to stress that our aim is not to suggest that learner achievements are exclusively related to teacher (un)satisfactory performance or linguistic (in) competence. As the ELLiE project showed, FLL learning is a very complex and dynamic

process in which learner lower or higher FLL achievements depend on numerous factors simultaneously.

5.3.3. Interaction task

Tape recording was also used in carrying out the interaction task or, so called, guessing game, also designed for the purpose of the ELLiE project. The aim of the task is to assess learner ability to understand and respond to short, simple questions, requests and statements and to ask simple questions at the end of the fourth year of FL instruction. The focal teachers were asked to select six focal learners according to their achievements (two very good, average and low achievers respectively), to participate in the task. However, we obtained oral production recordings of only four focal learners from each school. Learners were first asked to answer some familiar questions, followed by Step 1 of the guessing game, where they answered questions about a selected person in the picture. Step 2 required them to ask the interviewer questions about another person in the same picture. After the guessing game, learners were asked several more questions about their best friends. Focal learners' answers were recorded and transcribed for further statistical and comparative analysis in which we have looked at their: 1) fluency (the amount of language they were able to produce), 2) lexical diversity (the variety of words they were capable of demonstrating while taking part in the task) and 3) syntactic complexity (of the noun and verb phrase). In order to quantitatively analyse learner fluency we took into account the following measures: the total number of words (tokens), the number of different words (types) and the number of nouns produced by focal learners in the interaction task. Once this data was collected, we calculated learner lexical diversity by measuring Giraud's index. Finally, we reviewed the syntactic complexity of learner noun phrase syntax by measuring the ratio of determiners to nouns and the number of determiners, and verb phrase syntax by measuring the ratio of auxiliaries and clauses spoken by the learner in the whole of the task. Tape recordings of the interaction task

have also enabled us to describe and compare focal learners' performance in terms of pronunciation and prosodic features of their speech such as intonation and stress.

5.4. Results

5.4.1. Focal teachers' linguistic competences

On the basis of the classroom observations and recordings, we studied our focal teachers' linguistic performance. We took into account four different features of teacher language: pronunciation and prosody, grammatical and lexical accuracy and range, language of interaction and language of instruction.

The results showed that, in terms of pronunciation and prosody, both teachers provided very good language input for their learners. Moreover, most of teacher X and Y error correction was due to learners' wrong pronunciation which in turn resulted in much repetition of the problematic words for learners, such as woman [**woman**], watches [**wɔ:tʃs**], Thursday [**θruzdeɪ**], kite [**kit**]. In this way learners had the chance to hear the problematic words often enough to memorize their correct pronunciation.

When it comes to teachers' grammatical and lexical accuracy and range, the results vary. The research showed that Teacher X language did not contain any grammatical or lexical errors but, on the other hand, only a small amount of TL was used in the classroom. According to the ELLiE researcher's evaluation, about 25% of the time Teacher X used TL per lesson. Teacher X used TL mostly in presenting and practicing target vocabulary and structures, and at times for giving instructions. Some language inaccuracies were, however, found in TL use of the substitute teacher who replaced Teacher X in the second semester of year 3 and the first semester of year 4. The substitute teacher, who used TL exclusively when doing course book exercises, on one occasion, provided inaccurate feedback to learners when practicing declarative and interrogative sentences (*He does answer the phone.* instead of *He*

answers the phone.). The only other mistake noted was, a so called, ‘‘slip of the tongue’’, when the teacher misread *bottle of water* as *water of bottle* without correcting herself. Due to poor organization of classroom activities, the teacher spent most of lesson repeating instructions in Croatian, whereas a great amount of independent work, especially writing tasks prevented them from experiencing any real interaction. Thus, when asked about any problems in teaching her learners in the fourth-year interview, Teacher X expressed that her absence had caused some difficulties in her learners’ progress.

In comparison to School X teachers, teacher Y used considerably more amount of TL per lesson, more precisely, about 50% in the first two years and then she increased it to 70%. Other than presenting and practicing target vocabulary and structures, Teacher Y used TL when giving all simple and repetitive instructions, providing feedback on learners’ performance and disciplining. Teacher also insisted on the use of communicative patterns, such as *Hello, Good morning/afternoon, How are you?, Thank you.* and *You’re welcome.* Considering the greater amount of TL used in the classroom, more mistakes in teacher TL use were noted. These mainly concerned the incorrect word order in reported questions (*Can you tell me what’s this?**, *What do you think what’s this?**) and the incorrect use of prepositions in instructions such as *Open the book on the page 38.** Other mistakes concern the incorrect question formation in, for example, *How we say prosinac/svibanj/... in Croatian?**, and the lack of (in)definite articles as in, *He’s wearing red helmet.**, *Take look at her text.**, or *Look at picture.**. All of these mistakes have already been reported to be the most common mistakes English teachers make (Sešek, 2007). However, no lexical mistakes were noted.

In relation to focal teachers’ language of interaction, it was noted that in both teachers’ lessons predominated questions and elicitations, most frequent being: *What’s this?*, *Who’s this?* and *What colour is this?*. Both groups of learners mostly asked questions in Croatian. However, unlike Teacher X, Teacher Y answered mostly in English. Learners were constantly

engaged in interaction with both teachers through different classroom activities, predominately games with flashcards, listening tasks and chants. Teacher Y very frequently provided feedback on learners' performance using expressions such as *That's it, That's right, Very good, Excellent, Great* and encouraged them to participate (*C'mon, tell me*), whereas Teacher X mostly did so in Croatian. Both teachers were very successful in maintaining their pupils disciplined. However, when necessary, Teacher Y disciplined her pupils in TL with expressions such as *Sit down, Just a moment, Can you do it later?*.

The analysis of teachers' language of instruction showed that both teachers presented new vocabulary and structures in meaningful and interesting ways using flashcards. They both used TL when presenting and made sure that learners had enough opportunities to practice and acquire the presented content. When organizing classroom activities, mostly games, listening tasks and chants to practice the target vocabulary, both teachers gave more complicated instructions in Croatian whereas TL was reserved for more common and shorter instructions such as *Open/Close your activity/class books at page..., Look at the picture, Task number..., Sit down, Stand up*. However, Teacher Y used TL for other more complex instructions such as *Match the pictures, Draw the line, Listen and join, Colour the mouse number one red, Open your notebooks and copy these three sentences*. Both teachers provided enough explanation to foster learners' understanding and they did it mostly in Croatian. Both teachers used a lot of error correction, especially when it came to pronunciation. They also both set homework at the end of each lesson which usually consisted in finishing at home the activity they had started in the classroom.

5.4.2. Focal learners' linguistic competence

The interaction task enabled us to get an insight into fluency, lexical diversity and syntactic complexity of focal learners' oral production. In general, both groups of learners

were successful because they actively participated in the task. However, School Y learners slightly outperformed School X learners on almost all measures. Statistical analysis of learners' fluency took into account two measures, the total number of spoken words (tokens) and the total number of different words (types) spoken in the whole of the task. Focal learners from School Y had slightly better overall oral production when it comes to the total number of tokens and types used (Chart 1). Similarly, when it comes to the minimum and the maximum tokens used per learner, School Y learners also slightly out-numbered School X learners. The results of Giraud's index, used for measuring focal learners' lexical diversity, showed that School Y's learners are slightly better also on this measure (Table 2). All of the words produced by both groups of learners were correctly pronounced and stressed.

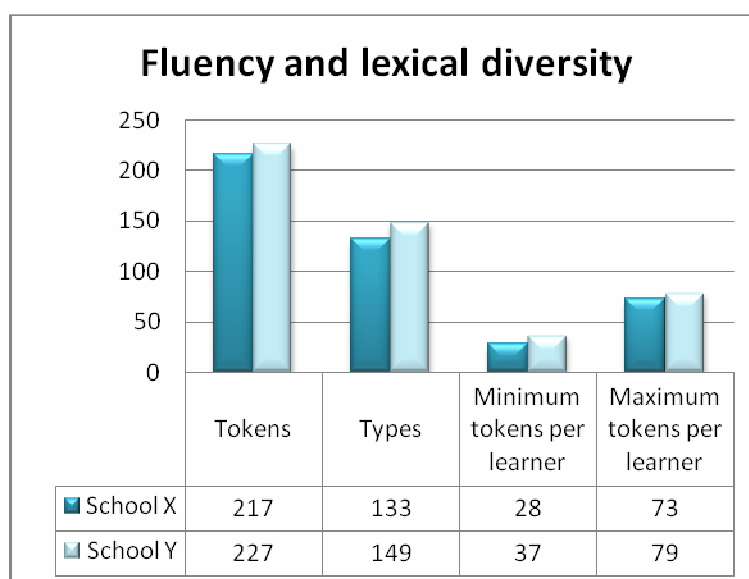


Chart 1.

Giraud's index

School X	18,38
School Y	19,56

Table 2.

In order to measure syntactic complexity of focal learners' oral production, several measures were taken into account: the total number of nouns, determiners, auxiliaries and clauses used in the whole of the task. The results showed that both groups of learners coincide when it comes to the total number of nouns and auxiliary verbs used in the task (Chart 2). Learners from School X used slightly more determiners whereas those from School Y used slightly more clauses in general, and more clauses per learner. In the use of determiners, mostly indefinite and definite articles, both groups of learners showed awareness of them, but their use of them was still inconsistent. Learners from School X used slightly more determiners per noun, whereas those from School Y used slightly more auxiliaries per clause. The ratio of determiners per noun was 57% in School X and 43% in School Y. Both groups of learners rarely answered in full sentences and had difficulties in forming interrogative sentences. However, it has to be noted that in general School Y learners' understanding and output tended to be more confident and more independent of the help of the interviewer and their L1 interventions. This was also noted in their formation of clauses where each School Y learner formed at least five correct sentences whereas School X learners formed minimally two sentences per learner. Both groups of learners used the same total number of auxiliary verbs, more precisely, only five. Both groups mostly used auxiliary verbs in the present continuous tense in two interrogative sentences only: *What is he/she wearing?* or *What is he/she doing?*.

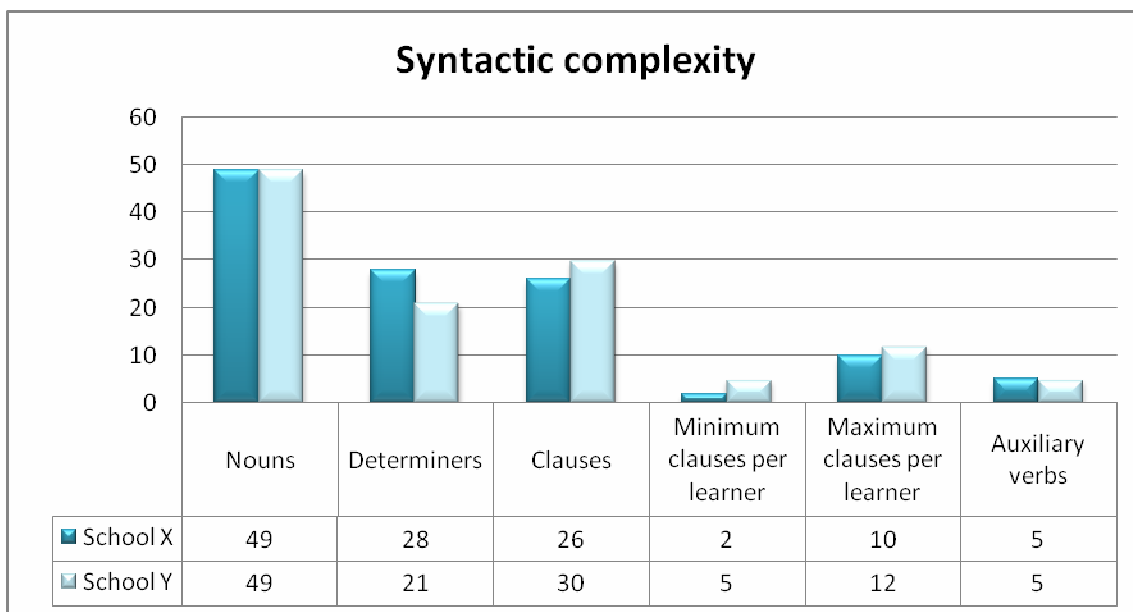


Chart 2.

	Noun phrase Det/N Ratio	Verb phrase Aux/CI Ratio
School X	2,33	0,65
School Y	1,83	0,73

Table 3.

The overall results of the interaction task and learners' answers that followed the task, permit us to state that both groups of learners reached the CEFR's A1 level in listening and speaking, as expected by the policies. Due to the nature of the task, we were not able to assess the other two language skills, reading and writing. Both groups of learners recognised familiar words and very basic phrases concerning their close surroundings and they were able to produce words and simple sentences providing personal information. They were also able to ask simple questions on very familiar topics. Below you can find the examples of oral production of the most successful among focal learners from each school from the study (Figure 1).

School X	School Y
<p>My name is (<i>name</i>). Ten One sister and one brother</p>	<p>My name is (<i>name</i>). I'm elev... ten. No.</p>
<p>_____</p> <p>A boy One Sad Tall Short black hair A jumper Green On a chair.</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>A boy Ten I don't know. He has got black hair. He read a book. He... a jumper. Green Yes.</p>
<p>_____</p> <p>It's a boy, yes and... How old is he? What is he doing? Playing What is he wearing? Yes.</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>Is a boy or a girl? How old is he? What is he doing? What colour is ...hm... hair? I don't know.</p>
<p>_____</p> <p>One. (<i>name</i>) (<i>name</i>) is ten years old. She's got a dark hair. She's tall and slim. Yes. Play football. Yes, one brother. No. Yes. Yes. No. Yes.</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>(<i>Name</i>) He aa blond hair. We play football. Basketball. Yes. He has got one sister and one brother. No. Yes. No. No.</p>

Figure 1.

5.5. Discussion

The aim of our research study was to explore the relationship between teacher and learner linguistic competences. In order to do so, we first investigated our two focal teachers' oral fluency in terms of pronunciation and prosody, grammatical and lexical accuracy and range. We also looked at different features of their classroom language, more precisely, how they used TL as a means of interaction and instruction. We then analysed and evaluated the

oral production of focal teachers' learners in terms of fluency, lexical diversity and syntactic complexity. It is now necessary to compare both groups of results in order to establish the relationship between learner and teacher linguistic competences.

To begin with, both groups of learners showed very good pronunciation, word stress and intonation. This can be attributed to the very good quality of input coming from both teachers and their persistence in correcting the wrong pronunciation. The results of the study also showed that both groups of learners achieved the expected A1 level in TL even though their teachers' use of TL in the classroom differed. In comparison to Teacher X, Teacher Y used significantly greater amount of TL in class for both instruction and interaction. This could in part explain why School Y learners outperformed their counterparts on almost all measures and why their oral production in the interaction task was more confident and independent. Besides using more tokens and types in the task, they also formed more clauses, in general and per learner, in comparison to School X. Such results support our first hypothesis which suggests that teacher language-specific competences, if used fluently, accurately and purposefully in the classroom, will have a positive effect on the development of learner communicative competence. Along with fluent, rich and varied TL input in the classroom, School Y learners most definitely benefited from their teacher's skilful use of methodology and pedagogy.

School X results showed that learners successfully acquired target vocabulary taught in the first four years, also most likely due to very good balance of their teacher's linguistic and pedagogical skills. The fact that they had slightly lower performance on almost all measures could be because of several substitute teachers they had during the last two years of FLL. The substitute teacher that we were able to observe did not follow the same teaching methods, nor did she provide TL input in the same way Teacher X did. Because of such circumstances, School X learners did not have the same continuity and the same exposure to

TL in the last two years of FLL as School Y learners. It is possible that, if they had had the same teacher during the four years, their performance would have been better. Taking this into account, our third hypothesis, about the amount of TL in the classroom and its effect on the development of learner communicative competence, is rejected. The results showed that, even though Teacher X used considerably lesser amount of TL in class, this had no significantly negative effect on learner achievements. It seems that, if L1 and TL use are well balanced within the classroom and supported with appropriate teaching methods and materials, effective FLL will definitely take place. Moreover, Teacher X used TL for only about 25% of lesson during the all four years of FLL, which is, according to the new communicative language teaching curriculum, not enough. However, this did not hinder School X learners' development of communicative competence at A1 level and thus our fourth hypothesis is also rejected.

The greatest difference in results was found in learners' use of determiners which is the only measure where School X learners outperformed School Y learners. When it comes to the types of determiners used, both groups used mostly indefinite articles, which were frequently interchanged with the number *one*, whereas definite articles were rarely used. This result is also found in another study into Croatian young learners' use of English articles (Balenović & Medved Krajnović, 2013). Since Teacher Y classroom talk revealed the lack of article use on several occasions, it could be suggested that this accounts for School Y learners' lower ratio of determiners used per noun. However, since there is no explicit teaching of determiners at this stage of FLL and that none of the other mistakes teacher made were reflected in learner production, we could say that our second hypothesis about the relation between teacher and learner lexico-grammatical mistakes can only be partially confirmed.

Auxiliary verbs were rarely used by both groups of learners, which is probably due to the fact that the present continuous tense, where auxiliaries were mostly required in the task, was introduced in the third year and learners still had not had enough chance to practice such a longer grammatical structure.

By comparing our focal teachers' and learners' linguistic competences, we were able to determine the features of classroom language that may have prompted the development of focal learners' communicative competence. On the basis of the results from our study, we have deduced several such features: 1) a good balance of TL and L1 use, according to learner profile and the type of classroom activity; 2) using as much TL as possible for both instruction and interaction; 3) providing accurate and fluent input, especially when teaching target vocabulary; 4) frequent error correction and insistence on accurate pronunciation, and 5) compensating the prevalence of L1 in class with the use of diverse materials, such as flashcards or realia, and learner-engaging activities such as listening tasks and chants in TL.

5.6. Limitations

Regardless of the value of our study results, there are several limitations we have to take into account before considering any generalizations. The main limitation of our study is a sample size which, if it had been larger, would have yielded more reliable data. This is especially true when it comes to focal learners. There were only four of them, which is not a representative sample of a class that consists of up to 25 pupils. When it comes to our focal teachers, they differed mainly in the amount and range of TL use in the classroom whereas they were equally successful in accurately presenting new vocabulary and structures, and organizing and carrying out classroom activities. It is, therefore, not altogether surprising that both groups of learners were successful in FLL. If the study had included two groups of learners with greater difference in final achievements, then there would have been a

possibility to draw more dramatic conclusions about the relationship between theirs and their teachers' linguistic competences. Another issue represents the fact that, even though both groups of learners came from very similar learning environment, School X learners had several substitute teachers and this had caused some problems in their progress, as suggested by their main teacher. Finally, another major limitation of our study, as in many other studies in the field of applied linguistics, is that it is almost impossible to make any straightforward conclusions about two variables that cannot be precisely measured and determined. Teacher and learner linguistic competences are such variables. Considering how complex and dynamic the nature of FLL is and taking into account numerous factors influencing the outcomes of FLL, we could never directly relate learner achievements to their teacher. Other factors, such as motivation, outside-of-school exposure to TL, learner and parent attitudes towards FLL, learner aptitude and other, all play an important role in FLL.

6. Conclusion

The aim of the present thesis was to study the relationship between teacher and learner linguistic competences. Our literature review implies that both teacher and learner linguistic competences are differently defined and treated in FL policies and FL teacher education. We have also established that teacher linguistic competences, in comparison to learner ones, are rarely assessed as well as their impact on learner achievements. However, in order to guarantee and enhance the success in FL teaching and learning, such studies would be very beneficial. With this purpose in mind, we have carried out a research study into Croatian primary school learners of English and their teachers. We have used the data obtained by ELLiE researchers who interviewed and observed the two teachers' classroom performance during the first four years of FLL. This data has enabled us to describe the two teachers' linguistic competences and the way they are displayed in the classroom. Learner language achievements, on the other hand, have been evaluated in the final year by means of an interaction task. The data collected has been analysed qualitatively and quantitatively and teacher and learner results have been compared in order to draw conclusions about the relationship between their linguistic competences.

On the basis of our research study, a positive relationship was found between teacher and learner linguistic competences. Firstly, teachers' fluent and accurate use of TL in the classroom along with frequent error correction and insistence on correct pronunciation led to learners' development of very good pronunciation and prosody. Secondly, the amount of TL used by teacher in the classroom proved to be less relevant to learner final achievements than presenting target vocabulary and structures in an interesting way and providing enough opportunities for practicing them. However, greater amount of TL, used for different purposes such as giving instructions, questioning or disciplining, makes learners more confident and

independent FL users. Thirdly, if very frequent, teacher's lexico-grammatical mistakes, such as the lack of article use, could be reflected in learners' lack of article use. Finally, lexical diversity and syntactic complexity of learner utterances depended on the frequent exposure to target vocabulary in the classroom through different play-like activities, chants and diverse materials. This also indicates that successful FLL depends on a good balance of both teacher linguistic competences and their methodological and pedagogical skills.

Considering the limitations of our study, further research in the field of teacher and learner linguistic competences is necessary. For example, a larger study sample which would include more teachers and learners would yield more reliable results. Similarly, the use of quantitative instruments in the assessment of teacher linguistic competences would enable a more objective analysis of teacher classroom performance. Finally, since lower primary school learners are expected to develop their FL skills at the A1 level, the linguistic demands set upon their teacher are also lower. Therefore, future classroom research should take into account teacher linguistic competences and their learner achievements at the higher levels of FLL.

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Sažetak

Cilj ovog diplomskog rada je istražiti odnos između lingvističkih kompetencija nastavnika i učenika u učenju stranog jezika. Dok je provjera učeničkih lingvističkih kompetencija u stranom jeziku vrlo zastupljena, ocjenjivanje istih kompetencija kod nastavnika je poprilično kontroverzna tema. Iako postoji nekolicina istraživanja lingvističkih kompetencija nastavnika stranih jezika, njihovo korištenje u razredu i utjecaj na učenička postignuća su rijetko istraživani. Međutim, takva istraživanja bi pružila vrijednu povratnu informaciju pri sastavljanju smjernica za nastavu stranih jezika i za obrazovanje nastavnika te bi se na taj način osigurala kvaliteta i uspjeh u učenju stranih jezika. Cilj našeg istraživanja je stoga bio procijeniti lingvistička postignuća učenika engleskoga jezika u odnosu na lingvističke kompetencije njihovih nastavnika u hrvatskom kontekstu. Istraživanje se temeljilo na podacima prikupljenima unutar longitudinalnog i međunarodnog projekta *Rano učenje jezika u Europi* (ELLiE). Istraživanje je uključivalo dvije nastavnice razredne nastave s pojačanim engleskim jezikom te četiri učenika svake nastavnice. Na temelju promatranja nastave i intervjua s nastavnicama tijekom prve četiri godine učenja engleskog jezika, proveli smo kvalitativnu analizu nastavničkih lingvističkih kompetencija. S druge strane, interakcijski zadatak, proveden na kraju četvrtog razreda s učenicima, omogućio je kvalitativnu i kvantitativnu analizu učeničkih verbalnih sposobnosti. Dobiveni rezultati su uspoređeni te je uspostavljen odnos između nastavničkih i učeničkih lingvističkih kompetencija. Rezultati istraživanja ukazali su da nastavničke lingvističke kompetencije, ukoliko se koriste tečno, ispravno i svrsishodno u razredu, potiču razvoj učeničkih lingvističkih sposobnosti.

Ključne riječi: nastavničke lingvističke kompetencije, rano učenje stranih jezika, učenička lingvistička postignuća, podučavanje stranih jezika u Hrvatskoj

APPENDIX I

Teacher questionnaire for the first year

Age
Status (civil servant, substitute teacher, etc.)
Teaching qualifications
Year and place of graduation
Experience teaching:
a) English? _____ year/s
b) Lower primary? _____ year/s
c) At this school? _____ year/s

1. Is this your first time teaching this level? Do you like teaching children this age or you prefer teaching older children? Why/ why not?
2. In general terms do you consider the age of 6 or 7 years as an appropriate age to begin language learning in school?
3. What do you think about a start age earlier than this?
4. What gains (if any) do you anticipate for the children from an early start?
5. How would you describe the way you teach children this age?
6. What are the most frequent activities that you do in class? What materials/resource do you usually use in class?
7. Would you use any other resources that are not presently available at the school?
8. What percentage of time do you use English in class? In what situations do you use the L2 and L1?
9. What learning conditions do you think contribute most to language learning at this level? (1= little important 4 = very important)
 - a) access to an English room
 - b) 4-5 sessions a week
 - c) small groups (12-15 students)
 - d) homogenous groups of students
 - e) long enough sessions

- f) integration of English with other areas of the curriculum
 - g) enough appropriate materials (textbook, posters, flashcards, realia, etc.)
10. Have you found any difficulties when teaching English at this level?
11. Do native speakers of English from outside the school ever visit learners in their classrooms? If so, give examples.
12. What areas of language learning are children this age better at / have most difficulty with?
13. Where have your class 1 students done more progress from the beginning of the year until now? What have most of your students learned so far as regards English?
14. In your class 1, do you have children with different levels of English or they have pretty much the same level? If so, what do you attribute the different levels to (aptitude, different degrees of L1 literacy, English in private lessons, etc.? Is that a problem when it comes to teaching the class?
15. Approximately how many children have attended English classes previously? For example, pre-school classes, infant school classes, after-school languages club, private language school classes, private tutor lessons etc.
16. Approximately how many children speak a home language other than Croatian?
17. In general, where would you place your staff opinions on the introduction of early language learning?
- a) very positive
 - b) mainly positive
 - c) unsure
 - d) mainly negative
18. How would you comment on the parents' views for this early start (6/7 years)?
- a) very positive
 - b) mainly positive
 - c) unsure
 - d) mainly negative
19. How have the children generally responded to learning a new language?
- a) enthusiastically
 - b) moderately willing
 - c) just another lesson
 - d) anxious
 - e) negatively

20. How does this attitude compare with students in other grades you have experience teaching?
21. What activities or materials do children in class 1 enjoy most/least in the English class?
22. How would you qualify the training you received from the university?
23. Have you attended any training after you graduated? If so when? How useful was it?
24. How would you describe the job of teaching English in lower primary?

APPENDIX II

Teacher questionnaire for the second year

1. What are children like this year in comparison to the last year?
2. What is their attitude to English this year? Has it changed and, if so, how?
3. How would you describe your teaching this year in comparison to the last year?
4. What are this year's most frequent classroom activities?
5. What kind of texts do children read?
6. What kind of writing tasks do children do?
7. Do you assign any homework for children? If yes, what is it like?
8. Do you give any tests during the year? If yes, what are they like?
9. What kind of activities and materials do children enjoy most this year?
10. What activities and materials do children enjoy least this year?
11. Do you encounter any difficulties with children? Which ones?
12. How would you qualify the training you received from the university?
13. Have you noticed any learner individual differences in the acquisition of certain language aspects? Explain.
14. What are yours and your colleagues' attitudes towards your participation in this international project?
15. Does your class use digital media outside of school? How?
16. Are children in contact with English when using digital media?
17. Have you noticed any differences between children who use digital media at home and those who do not? Is there any difference in their motivation or progress in English?

APPENDIX III**Teacher questionnaire for the fourth year**

1. How do you think the parents' feel about their children learning a FL?
 - a) very positive
 - b) mainly positive
 - c) neutral
 - d) mainly negative very negative

2. Have you got any recent response from parents' on your FL teaching/learning?

3. How would you describe the children's attitudes in the FL class this year? Are children's attitudes towards the FL class somehow different this year?

4. Have you found any difficulties when teaching English/FL at this level this year?

APPENDIX IV

Interaction task (Guessing game)



What's your name?
How old are you?
Have you got any brothers or sisters?

L1: Choose a person in the picture and I will guess who this is.

Is it a boy or a girl?
How old is he/she?
Is he/she happy or sad?
What does s/he look like?
What is s/he wearing?
Where is this person in the picture?
What is s/he doing?
Would you like to be his/her friend?

L1: Now, it's my turn. I will choose a person and you guess.

(Enever, 2011, p. 137)

Questions that followed the guessing game:

Who is your best friend?

Is he/she a good friend?

What does he/she look like?

Does he/she have any brothers or sisters?

What do you do together?

Does he live near to you?

Do you watch TV sometimes together?

Do you play computer games together?

Do you watch programmes or films on the computer?