Abstract

Target language competence of EFL teachers is an important aspect of EFL teaching and teacher expertise, and a case of ESP which is often not acknowledged as such. This paper presents a target language needs analysis for EFL teachers, carried out in Slovenia between 2003 and 2005. A survey of the literature shows that such studies are rare, even though there are reports from several countries of EFL teachers’ insufficient target language competence. The study presented used the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages as a model for describing the language needs of EFL teachers in and outside of their classrooms. A series of 11 interviews, 48 classroom observations, 3 case studies and 93 reports from novice teachers yielded a list of language activities and competences that EFL teachers in Slovenia specifically need to develop. The study also sheds light on the question of how target language needs differ according to the level and context of teaching. The results are of value to all those involved in developing and redesigning EFL teacher training programs, particularly their language training component, in the countries where English is taught as a foreign language.

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1. Introduction

Much of today’s world is learning English as a key foreign language, and is doing so through organized instruction delivered by teachers who very often are non-native speakers of English. While historically, foreign language instruction has not always happened...
through the target language, in past decades this has increasingly been the case or at least
the desired standard. Certainly, this is partly due to factors such as the central position of
English speaking countries in the area of EFL methodology and materials design (Phillip-
son, 1992), but there is also evidence that supports the teaching of English primarily
through the medium of English, with appropriate cross-linguistic support (Stern, 1992).
In countries such as Slovenia, the presence of English has increased considerably over
the past twenty years, as have general levels of English proficiency in the population.
To a greater extent than ever before, today’s EFL teachers are faced with the challenge
of achieving appropriate levels of target language proficiency for carrying out their profes-
sional activities.

It has been argued that the English required by EFL teachers is a case of ESP,
although not entirely comparable to some other types of ESP (Elder, 2001), and this
is too often overlooked in EFL teacher training (Johnson, 1990; Richards, 1998). At
the same time, the target language competence of EFL teachers is reported to be insuf-
ficient in many countries (e.g. Berry, 1990; Guntermann, 1992; Murdoch, 1994; Sadtono,
1995). This situation might be related to a lack of an ESP approach to developing Eng-
lish competence in future teachers. Admittedly, much EFL teacher training today, at
least in Europe, is still nested within traditional language and literature studies, where
the students’ target language proficiency development is often marginalized as a curric-
ular goal and conceptualized as English for General Purposes (Snell-Hornby, 1982)
rather than profiled from the point of view of the graduates’ future profession. In one
of the first volumes of the ESP Journal, Kennedy (1983) called for an ESP approach
to training EFL/ESL teachers, but an internet review of programmes of this kind
around Europe reveals that courses as specific as the Finnish University of Joensuu’s
‘Classroom Language’ are still a rarity.

Of course, target language competence is not an isolated aspect of language teacher
expertise. The knowledge base of teacher education in general is broad and complex
(see for example, the UK Standards for the Award of Qualified Teacher Status (Teacher
Training Agency, 2005; Shulman & Shulman, 2004)). While it is clear that the teacher’s
mastery of the subject of teaching is one of its key components, foreign language teaching
is specific in this respect as the target language is not only the subject but also the tool of
the instruction process (Long, 1983). In the case of English, the teacher’s mastery of the
target language is also related to cultural, economic and political issues, and is thus fre-
cently discussed in the literature dealing with the status of native versus non-native teach-
ers (e.g. Braine, 1999; Canagarajah, 1999; Kamhi-Stein, Lee, & Lee, 1999). Some of the
other sources dealing with the profile of a foreign language teacher do not pay much attention
to the teacher’s target language competence (e.g. Schrier, 1994; Tsui, 2003; Kelly
et al., 2004), while some define it as a key competence, separate from the knowledge about
the target language and cultures and other specific knowledge (e.g. Balbi, 1996; Trappes-
Lomax, 2002). Richards (1998), in one of the most thorough attempts to define a
knowledge base for the preparation of EFL teachers, defines ‘communicative skill and tar-
get language competence’ as one of the six major areas, which, although intricately inter-
connected in practice, can and should be separated for the purposes of research.

In terms of planning the language development component of an EFL teacher prepa-
ration program, the literature cited so far represents just a framework, a skeleton to be
fleshed out. What data can be obtained to investigate this? The 1980s research on language
teacher talk (Chaudron, 1988) yielded interesting but fragmented and fairly tentative
results on issues such as repetition of language items, use of wait time, rate of speech and syntactic simplification. Textbooks for EFL teachers such as Hughes (1981), Spratt, 1997 or Gardner and Gardner (2000) mostly focus on the lexico-grammatical features of teacher talk using a functional–notional approach, without providing information about the research basis of their content. Some further specific features of FL teachers’ language use are mentioned in the ‘Language Instructor Manual’ published by the University of California at San Diego (UCSD, 2001). Other possible sources for descriptions of English for TEFL are the various national standards for teacher qualifications (e.g. the Hong Kong LPATE (Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers of English (EMB)), but these take the form of testing criteria, which have limited use as input for curriculum design. Practically the only comprehensive study in the area so far was done within the European project ‘A Language Profile for an FL Primary Language Teacher’, which, however, focused only on primary level teachers (Bondi, 2002).

Clearly, all these sources are contributions to a knowledge base for the EFL profession, but there is also a need for integration. A holistic, systematic, empirically based description of English for the profession could be used to provide EFL teachers with a better, more efficiently profiled target language competence and thus help them improve their linguistic and overall performance. This paper presents a study whose aim was to produce such a description.

2. The research

The study was a target needs analysis of English for teachers of EFL in Slovenia. In this Central European country with 2 million inhabitants, over 90% of whom speak Slovene as their mother tongue, English instruction has been present in most educational programs since the 1950s, and has intensified enormously since the early 1990s. This has entailed a need for constant development of English teaching and teacher training, and has also provided a sufficient pool of data for empirical research. The aim of the study was to describe the practical linguistic knowledge base of quality EFL teaching, which would be useful as a basis for (re)designing Slovene EFL teacher education programs, particularly their target language training component. It has been the only research of its kind so far in Slovenia, and, as shown previously, also one of very few similar enterprises internationally.

The study, spanning two years, applied a qualitative methodological design with three different sources of data – classroom observation, interviews and written teacher reflection, drawing on a fairly large sample of Slovene EFL teachers of various professional backgrounds, as explained in Section 3.

In view of the desired practical applicability of the results, an attempt was made to capture all the different facets of an EFL teacher’s professional language activity, from their work in and outside of the classroom to professional development. Recognizing that EFL is taught in different contexts, for different purposes, to different groups of learners at different levels, the study also tried to explore the various demands this imposes on the teacher’s target language competence (Chaudron, 1988; Sadtono, 1995).

The model of language description for the study was the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001), from here onwards referred to as CEF, whose components are presented in Fig. 1.

Of course, some of the CEF categories received more attention in the study than others. Since we researched the work of teachers, the communicative domain, for example, was
defined in advance as professional (while at the same time public and educational), and so were the media typically used by teachers (voice, print, manuscript, audio/videotape). As for some other categories, it became obvious in the course of the research that they were very difficult for the participants to access (e.g. situational factors and strategies of language use) and have therefore been dealt with only tangentially. A third set of categories – general language user competences, involves going beyond any specific language, and researching them would not contribute directly to the aims of the study. We thus focused the research on:

(a) the communicative tasks/purposes and language activities, and
(b) the language user’s communicative language competences.

These categories of the Framework were used directly in the interview protocol and as tags in the process of data analysis.

3. Sampling and methodology

According to Brown (1995), a needs analyst should carefully consider the groups of participants to include in the study. The main informants in a target needs analysis are of course the practitioners in target situations – in our case, Slovene teachers of EFL. To

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This is defined in the CEF as 'the sum of the individual characteristics, personality traits and attitudes which concern, for example, self-image and one's view of others, and willingness to engage with other people in social interaction' (Council of Europe, 2001: 11,12).

This is defined in the CEF as the ability to read aloud (Council of Europe, 2001).
embrace different definitions of need (Berwick, 1989) and to combine different perspectives, both experienced and beginner teachers were included, as well as a smaller number of headmasters and students.

The study encompassed:

- observation of 48 English lessons in Slovene primary and secondary schools;
- three case studies of beginner EFL teachers working in private language schools;
- 11 interviews with teachers and headmasters;
- analysis of 93 reports from school-based teaching practice written by novice EFL teachers finishing their training at the University of Ljubljana.

For classroom observation, we used a convenience sample of public school teachers cooperating with the English Department of the University of Ljubljana. For interviews, we used a combination of convenience, stratified purpose sampling and snowball. The main criteria were based on an estimate of strata of the target population (region, gender, years and variety of teaching experience, context of teaching). For the case studies, we recruited three novice teachers working at private language schools. This was to balance out somewhat to complement the classroom observation sample from public schools only. The reports from school-based teaching practice were collected from all EFL degree candidates at the University of Ljubljana between March 2003 and March 2005.

The classroom observations were carried out in two consecutive semesters. The interviews were carried out in two phases: an initial exploratory series of three interviews and a series of eight in-depth interviews toward the end of the study. The case studies lasted one semester, and consisted of three classroom observations of each case teacher (beginning, middle and end of the semester), three interviews and a semester’s worth of diary entries according to the researcher’s instructions. The reports from trainee teachers were written after their first school placement as reflective essays of approximately 1.5 pages in length.

A qualitative methodology was more appropriate for the study than large-scale surveying for several reasons. Firstly, the lack of exact information about the target population might have made the results too tentative. Secondly, as Medgyes (1994) points out, target language proficiency is the aspect of expertise language teachers are most self-conscious about, and this would probably affect the response rate and reliability of survey results. In addition, we cannot assume that every EFL teacher is an ideal or typical user of the target language in the target situations, as seems often to be assumed in other types of ESP. While distinguishing clearly between ‘good and bad’ EFL teaching is inherently problematic, it was inevitable that we attempt to address this in some way as there is no other way to determine success/quality or its opposite in the area of teacher target language use. Survey methods would not sufficiently enable us to do this. Also, including what might be considered unrepresentative cases can be valuable in research, especially when looking for a difficult-to-define standard of performance.

The study was thus based on a constructivist perspective on research (Patton, 2002), following the principles of thoroughness, explicitness and depth of description in order to facilitate naturalistic generalization of the results on the part of their users. We also incorporated specific strategies to compensate for the limitations of the study. As to the questions of distinguishing between ‘good and bad’ EFL teaching and avoiding misunderstandings stemming from different conceptions of language, we were careful to make
explicit our own views and to elicit without bias the views of the participants. A problem which is typical of any language needs analysis is that informants might not be able to describe their language use appropriately. This may seem unlikely when our informants are themselves language professionals, but we have to remember that language use is a rather unconscious aspect of a teacher’s work. For this reason, we asked the case study teachers to keep a diary to help them consciously keep track of their language use. Of course this had the side-effect of manipulation of their language use over the semester as well. The diaries were kept in Slovene (making the introspection easier for the teachers), with examples of classroom discourse in English. Interviewees were sent the questions in advance so that they had more time to reflect on them and become aware of this aspect of their work.

Altogether, the collection of data yielded over 700 pages of text, which was analysed in stages using content analysis. First, data from each part of the study (lesson observation, interviews, case studies, school placement reports) were tagged separately using the categories of language description from the CEF. We primarily looked into the various aspects of communicative language competences (see Fig. 1), for which the CEF gives detailed descriptions: vocabulary range and control, grammatical accuracy, phonological control, orthoepic competence, orthographic control, register, dialect/accent, use of markers of social relations/politeness conventions, sociolinguistic appropriateness, flexibility to circumstances, turntaking, thematic development, coherence and cohesion, functional competence (which we interpreted as a match between perceived purpose, form and effect of communicative act), fluency and propositional precision. The tagged summaries were then synthesized to arrive at overall results. To illustrate the types of information gained from different parts of the study, and partly also the process of analysis itself, we quote and briefly comment on excerpts of data from the four sources.

4. Results

4.1. Lesson observation

The purpose of lesson observation was to identify the main issues of teacher talk in Slovene English classes and gather specific examples of the required language knowledge to be related to the CEF. This precluded the use of instruments such as the COLT scheme (see e.g. Nunan, 1992) or a detailed instrument prepared specifically for this study. The approach was thus a mixture of ethnography and interaction analysis. The data from each lesson included information about time, school, teacher, topic, lesson format and atmosphere, and commented quotations of student–teacher interactions.

In the excerpt in Fig. 2, we can see examples of the teacher successfully drawing on several specific aspects of her English competence (as described in the CEF) to achieve her teaching aims, such as special intonation and sentence stress patterns (phonological competence), lexical repetition and modelling, questions and polite phrases for specific classroom functions. We also noted some limitations in the teacher’s phonological and grammatical competence.

In observing the classroom discourse, we found it useful to draw on the concept of a critical incident (Butterfield et al., 2005) in the sense of an unexpected or problematic event or moment in the classroom. Since successful teacher talk makes a lesson look ‘seamless’ and is thus sometimes difficult to describe, we tried to capitalize on breakdowns in class-
room communication as its mirror target language use. In Fig. 3, sample 1 points to the importance of the teacher’s signposting of the lesson and establishing coherence. Sample 2 shows how limitations of the teacher’s phonological competence can cause a setback in a lesson and even disrupt teacher–student rapport.

4.2. Case studies

The three case study teachers worked with adults and young children. In this part of the study, certain issues came into focus which illustrate the complexity of the teacher’s language use in the classroom and the ways in which it affects the learners. One of the issues was code-switching. As two of the cases showed, this was related to classroom discipline, and therefore the teacher’s process of deciding when to switch called not only on the linguistic competence of flexibility (an aspect of pragmatic competence according to
the CEF) but also on the complex skill of pedagogical decision-making (see e.g. Woods, 1996).

One further interesting finding was that a teacher with a deficiency in a certain aspect of language competence (in one of the cases, the use of articles in English), may pass on this deficiency to the learners in several ways simultaneously; in our case, by giving faulty input and by not attending to the same deficiency in learner output. The teacher, whom we will call Nina, produced many sentences in each lesson where she omitted articles, such as ‘That’s pretty good one.’, ‘In next exercise we have...’, ‘It’s always possibility.’ At the same time, she practically never reacted to article omissions that were frequently produced by her learners. She, for example, praised a learner who produced the sentence ‘We might create bad feeling.’ without modelling a more correct version. Of course, forms of error correction and their value for the learning process are complex issues, but we believe that in a standard classroom setting, absence of attention to a common learner error over an extended period of time does not contribute to learners developing correct usage, particularly if the error also tends to occur in the input provided by the teacher talk.

In another case, we observed how a teacher attempting to teach communicatively using English only was constantly faced with unpredictable demands on her vocabulary, and how the teaching/learning process was affected when the teacher had visible limitations in this aspect of target language competence. A teacher whom we will call Maja produced this sentence in discussing a character from a reading passage with her learners: ‘He doesn’t do this intentionally, he just... well, you know!’ Maja’s inability to finish the sentence due to a gap in her lexical competence meant that the learners were left to guess her meaning and could not check their understanding of the reading passage.

4.3. Interviews

The interviews were semi-structured. The question protocol drew partly on literature about teacher language competence in general, and partly on the CEF (see Appendix). The teachers reflected on their own professional language use and development, the issue of different teaching contexts, and the relations between their language competence and other factors affecting their teaching. They also commented in detail on the relevance of the CEF categories to the linguistic demands of their work.

Some of the responses from the interviewees pointed directly to training needs. One such point which was raised by several teachers but which did not show as clearly in other parts of the study (lesson observation and teacher diaries) was the need for the EFL teacher to have better translation skills.

A statement by a grammar school headmaster was also interesting: ‘A young English teacher needs too much time to study the textbook unit before teaching it for the first time. I think it’s their vocabulary that’s the problem.’ This point coincides with self-reports by several novice teachers (mostly those who taught at grammar schools) that the learner level posed a problem for them in terms of lexical competence.

Another important, though probably not surprising finding was that all the participating teachers found it hard to separate their target language use and competence from other aspects of their work. While they were able to list their typical language activities and most frequently used grammatical structures, or comment on the importance of intonation in teacher talk, they struggled with questions such as how to define success or failure in the teacher’s target language use. This seems to confirm not only that target language
competence is a less conscious aspect of teacher expertise, but also how tightly it is interwoven with pedagogical knowledge and practice. Two of the teachers particularly highlighted this. Ksenija, a grammar school teacher with 20 years of experience, said that ‘Mastery of instructional conversation is not a matter of language competence, it is a matter of personality.’ Sarolta, an experienced university teacher of English for tourism said: ‘If your language knowledge is broad enough, you can adapt to whatever learner level, but that really hinges more on empathy than language knowledge as such. If you don’t have empathy, you will even fail in primary school.’

A third insight that seemed to be tapped into by virtually all of the interview questions is what different demands a teacher faces at different levels and in different contexts of teaching. For example, one of the interview questions (see Appendix) asked teachers from different contexts which aspect of language use is the most important for learners. All the grammar school teachers and the university teacher stressed the importance of what CEF terms general competence – knowledge of the world and sociocultural knowledge, but this was not mentioned by teachers from any other educational context.

4.4. Reports from school-based teaching practice

At the English Department at the University of Ljubljana, all EFL teacher candidates go through a school placement, which they have to document carefully. One of the post-placement tasks is a reflective essay discussing any aspect of their experience. A young teacher’s first classroom experiences tend to be challenging and stressful; this part of the study uncovers diagnostic need as trainees more often focus on difficulties than successes. Out of the 380 archived reports, we analysed for the purposes of this study 93 reports (25% of the total) in which trainees discussed their language competence. The most frequent issue (mentioned in 27 reports (28%)) was adapting one’s output to the needs of the learners. A typical extract reads:

‘The thing that worried me most was whether I would be able to adapt my language to the language level of the student. I was wondering how to avoid using the words and phrases you study hard to acquire and, what is more, you are often not even aware of using them’ (Peter, Idrija Primary School).

The next biggest issue for teacher candidates was, perhaps understandably, facing learners whose level of English is already high, followed by code-switching between English and Slovene, and problems with specific communicative tasks. Six students reported difficulties in the area of lexical competence; while this is not a high number, their words convincingly illustrate the same finding in other parts of the study.

5. Synthesis and discussion

In synthesizing the data from the different sources, we first tried to establish the relative significance of different language skills for the teachers. Obviously, speaking tops the list (an average of 10–30 hours a week). A further 3–20 hours per week are spent using English for supporting activities (lesson preparation, assessment) and 1–2 hours for professional development. The second most heavily employed skill is reading, followed by writing and listening. While it is common sense that the speaking skill is the ‘make-or-break requirement’ for a language teacher (Britten, 1985), teacher preparation planners may
need to be reminded of this fact since in Slovenia future EFL teachers get about 15 minutes practice in this skill per week during their studies. This is entirely disproportionate to the actual demands of their later professional work.

We further looked for a ‘priority list’ of language activities. For each activity proposed in the CEF, which is quite general, we tried to find a parallel in terms of a teacher’s tasks in or outside of the classroom. In the interviews, the teachers were asked to name those of their professional activities which in their opinion would correspond most closely to the individual language activities listed in the CEF (pages 57–90) (a detailed version of the broadly defined language activities in Fig. 1). To illustrate this, the Appendix shows an excerpt from the interview protocol dealing with the speaking activities (the first four are listed in the CEF under ‘Productive speaking activities’ and the others under ‘Interactive speaking activities’). Fig. 4 summarizes the interviewees’ responses, revealing an ESP version of the speaking activities defined in the CEF in general terms only.

The study (particularly the lesson observations and trainee self-reports) further revealed a list of speech functions in which EFL teachers in Slovenia seem to require specific practice: explaining (grammar and lexical meanings), eliciting a specific language item, perceiving errors in learner output and responding to them, prompting the learners to use the target language, exemplifying the use of a language item in context, repeating language items to support their memorization, and translating as a support/scaffolding strategy.

A priority listing of writing, reading and listening activities was also drawn using the CEF categories. Writing activities were mostly judged as important only for lesson preparation and professional development, and directly important for teaching only when writing in EFL is a learning aim for a particular group of learners. As examples of writing tasks specific to the profession, interviewees pointed out materials and test writing; these seem to be required to a surprising extent across many contexts, despite the abundance of ready-made materials available to most teachers nowadays. Listening activities such as listening to the conversation of native speakers, TV, audio recordings and live lectures were mainly judged to be important for the teacher’s target language maintenance and development, and for participation in professional development events. Reading activities were considered very important for EFL teaching, in particular reading aloud as an unexpected but frequently used teacher classroom activity, followed by reading for information (searching for classroom materials, using professional development literature and reading instructions accompanying teaching materials). Interviewees also stressed that much of the reading mentioned needs to be critical.

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<tr>
<th>LANGUAGE ACTIVITY</th>
<th>TEACHING ACTIVITY</th>
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<td>Conversation, informal</td>
<td>Lesson execution and class management, moderating class discussion</td>
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<td>discussion</td>
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<td>Public announcements</td>
<td>Introducing lesson topics / aims / activities</td>
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<td>Spoken presentation – longer</td>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>Teachers should avoid producing long monologues in</td>
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<td>monologue</td>
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<td>Interviewing</td>
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<td>Goal-oriented cooperation</td>
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<td>teacher has a fairly equal relationship with learners.</td>
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Fig. 4. Types of teacher speaking activities based on the CEF.
The second aspect of language description aimed at in the study was the desired language competences, where the needs identified were mostly diagnostic in nature, and at least partly related to English–Slovene contrastive issues. In terms of grammatical competence, the most problematic items for the participating Slovene teachers, expert and novice alike, were reported questions and articles. Novices also frequently misused question words. Clearly, question formation is a key aspect of grammatical competence for language teaching. Lexical competence was the area where the teachers studied had the most gaps, mainly in using prepositional phrases and collocation. For example, several teachers in the study announced a test to their students by saying: ‘We are going to write a test next week.’ Another problematic phrase was ‘In the picture’, which is typical of EFL teacher talk, albeit not in the sense of being restricted to this field, as in some other types of ESP, but in terms of frequency. In semantic terms we observed that novice teachers often fail to produce lexemes (e.g. a trainee discussing natural disasters with upper-intermediate students could not think of the word ‘drought; a trainee discussing personality characteristics failed to produce the word ‘thorough’). The examples we recorded occurred in predictable contexts and were not infrequent or obscure items. On the contrary, they clustered around topics such as everyday life, sports and work. This was confirmed in all the sections of the study and is probably a result of EFL teachers studying in academic programs which stress a different array of topics and registers.

In terms of phonological competence we looked into the phonemic accuracy, word stress and prosody of the participating teachers. There were relatively few deviations from standard British English (which is still considered the norm in Slovene EFL circles). We identified the most frequent errors in sound production such as a lack of distinction between the long and short vowel sounds /i/ and /iː/. Word stress did not prove to be an issue, but novice teachers often had an overly narrow pitch range or used wrong, repetitious or inconsistent intonation patterns.

In terms of sociolinguistic competence, the teacher’s consistent use of politeness conventions (such as modality and indirect requests) and the pronoun ‘we’ was observed in classes where the teacher had a visibly positive rapport with their learners. Register should be, as a general rule, consistently neutral or slightly formal, but teachers should have the ability to vary this according to context, learner group and teaching aim. We also tried to address the important issue of which variety of English Slovene EFL teachers should use, but there seems to be very little consensus possible on this loaded issue.

Pragmatic competence was a category which invited the inclusion of the two characteristics of EFL teacher talk that proved the most problematic for Slovene novice teachers. The first was code-switching – the ‘dosage’ of the mother tongue and the target language, as one interviewee put it, and the functionally meaningful use of each, particularly with younger students. This, in CEF terms, would fit under the category of flexibility, which is one of the main aspects of pragmatic competence (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 124). In most cases, novice teachers used too much target language. Secondly, the teacher’s talk in the target language has to be adapted to the learner’s level in many different ways. Some novice teachers used language appropriate for younger learners with older learners (which was not received well at all), and vice versa. Also, while they generally tried to use English as much as possible, they sometimes used Slovene for reasons which had nothing to do with learner need. Using the target language for direct disciplining seems to be ineffective, but an appropriate amount and level of target
language input seems to affect discipline positively by raising the level of challenge for the learners.

The second question considered in the study was whether there are any differences in the desired target language proficiency of teachers at different levels and/or in different contexts. The interviews and case studies confirm that this particularly is the case. For younger learners, the appropriate amount and functional use of mother tongue/target language, speech modifications and accuracy are crucial. Grammar schools (for learners aged 15–19 preparing for university) seem to be the most demanding in this respect; the teacher needs a high level of fluency, high lexical competence and excellent pronunciation. For the teachers of ESP (for example, English for tourism), priority language areas are lexical and sociolinguistic competence. Interviewees were also able to pinpoint the most frequent grammatical structures employed by teachers at various levels. In terms of phonological competence, varied and clearly functional use of intonation patterns seems to be a universal. There are some differences in terms of language activities and functions; in some contexts, the teachers need to constantly prompt the learners to speak in English, while in others this is hardly necessary. Similarly, for teachers of ESP, reading is a much more important ‘support skill’ than for teachers of young learners.

6. Conclusion

While the results of the study presented in this article do not radically depart from existing knowledge about EFL teacher linguistic expertise, they both confirm this knowledge and build on it to portray ‘teacher English’ as a case of ESP and provide an overview of some of its key features. Such a synthesis has been missing in the planning of EFL teacher preparation programs, as information about the professional language needs of non-native EFL teachers could only be found scattered in several different sources which often focused only on certain aspects, are not easily available, nor empirically supported, and are more appropriate for testing purposes than curriculum design. Another important feature of the study is that it used the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages as its model of language description, which was created precisely for such purposes and is being used more and more widely around Europe as a tool of standardization and quality enhancement of language education.

The results of the study can be applied to EFL teacher preparation at several levels. Firstly, at the level of curriculum design, it is clear that developing the trainee’s language competence should aim at the specifics that define the EFL profession. Secondly, factors such as personality and pedagogical knowledge are tightly interwoven with target language mastery and it is thus often not possible to practice specific target language use separately from specific target situations. This means that target language training for EFL teachers should be integrated with the development of other aspects of expertise and involve as much simulation and classroom practice as possible – this, in broad terms, gives us the key guideline for the methodology of EFL teacher language preparation. There are two further principles we can derive from the study: the teacher’s target language competence should be broad enough to enable the teacher to function in a variety of teaching contexts, and automated to such an extent that it does not cause unnecessary stress to the teacher or prevent them from pursuing a certain teaching aim.

In terms of goals and content, the study gives a view of the aspects of language future EFL teachers need to focus on most. At this level of program design, the
CEF categories of language use and competences can and should be integrated. For example, in training teachers to elicit learner talk, we can pay attention to question formation (grammatical competence), the use of intonation (phonological competence) and various register options and lexical realizations of a certain proposition (lexical and sociolinguistic competence).

Of course, some of the issues go beyond target-specific training such as a one-semester course in classroom speaking skills (which would focus, for example, on the skills laid out in Fig. 4) or writing texts for learners. Adapting one’s output to the learner’s level implies empathy, which, as Medgyes (1994) points out, is a function of self-awareness, and this is a principle that needs to be embedded in the entire program. The same applies to asking questions, which proved to be one of the greatest deficiencies for participating teachers. If future teachers go through a traditional lecture-based program where they are seldom, if ever, given room for curiosity, questioning and inquiry, it will probably not suffice to simply maximize the use of groupwork in their tutorials. Another example is lexical competence (shown to be deficient in the case studies and interviews); giving future teachers a scope that will enable them to cater for a wide variety of learner needs probably cannot be expected of a single course but requires well-coordinated content planning at the level of the entire teacher preparation program. Considering different demands on teacher language competence in different teaching contexts as described at the end of Section 5, program planners can also consider whether and to what extent they wish to create room within their training programs for candidates to specialize in teaching young learners, grammar school learners or ESP learners.

Of course, as it is impossible to define a single standard of best practice in teaching EFL in general, it is also impossible to define such a standard for one of its aspects – a teacher’s target language use. Nevertheless, we believe that this paper makes a contribution to an evolving ESP approach toward language training of EFL teachers. Such an approach is a crucial step toward a better, appropriately profiled target language proficiency of EFL teachers, which would contribute to the quality of EFL instruction across many different settings.

Appendix. Interview question protocol

Sample interview questions

- Please rate the amount of time you use English for your work in a week:
  - teaching
  - preparing lessons and assessment
  - professional development

- What does knowing English very well mean for you personally?
- What, in your opinion, are the main differences between a teacher using English in their work well/badly?
- What are the main types of language activity you carry out in English in the classroom (giving instructions, explaining, provoking students' reactions, correcting, etc.)?
- Which aspect of a teacher’s speech in English do you consider the most important? – accuracy – fluency – phonetics – vocabulary – other.
• How is your use of English in the classroom affected by situational factors (time, personal mood, size of learner group etc.)?
• What, in your opinion, are the main differences in the demands on a teacher’s English between different contexts of teaching (beginners, children, advanced, ESP, adults, etc.)?
• Please imagine that you are designing an EFL teacher training program. Which of the following language activities in EFL teaching would you set as training priorities?

First number the following speaking activities listed in the Common European Framework according to the order of importance (1 – most important for a teacher to master, 2 – second most important, etc.) Try to think of classroom parallels to the activities.

• Sustained monologue: describing experience.
• Sustained monologue: putting a case.
• Public announcements.
• Addressing audiences.
• Conversation.
• Informal discussion.
• Formal discussion and meetings.
• Goal-oriented cooperation.
• Transactions to obtain goods and services.
• Information exchange.
• Interviewing and being interviewed.
• Which, in your experience, are the most important specific features of an EFL teacher’s use of intonation and stress?
• Which variety of English, in your opinion, should an EFL teacher use and which register?

References


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