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The production-oriented approach (POA) in Hungary: piloting POA in the Hungarian higher education context

The production-oriented approach for English learners in China is a method which aims to improve and facilitate learners' productive skills with receptive skills as mediators. In order to make the method more efficient, a special coursebook entitled "iEnglish 1: viewing, listening, and speaking" was also designed in China. Since the coursebook contains several business-related topics, a unit was chosen that best fits the syllabi of the courses of the students at the Budapest Business School: University of Applied Sciences and this unit was taught through POA. The main aim of this paper is to provide insights into the effectiveness of the method as well as the coursebook in a non-Chinese context. The findings suggest that the transferability of the coursebook from the Chinese context to the Hungarian context requires certain alterations in the coursebook in order to make it more suitable for use.

Keywords: *coursebook analysis, higher education, methodology, piloting a coursebook, production-oriented approach*

Introduction

In order to enhance the quality of foreign language teaching in China, Wen (2016; 2017) proposed her new language teaching method, the production-oriented approach (POA). In the name of this method, the term "production" is used instead of "output" because it does not exclusively focus on the traditional productive skills, such as speaking and writing, but also attempts to incorporate translation and interpreting skills in the teaching and learning processes (Wen, 2016). At the Budapest Business School: University of Applied Sciences, much emphasis is placed on new foreign language teaching methods, therefore besides the portfolio method (Bánhegyi – Fajt – Dósa, 2020), POA was also chosen for piloting. The pilot process, which took place in the spring semester of the academic year 2018/19, was focusing on the question of transferability of teaching methods and coursebooks from one context to another: namely from the Chinese context, for which the coursebook was originally written, to the Hungarian tertiary education context, where the coursebook was piloted. The coursebook *"iEnglish 1:*

viewing, listening and speaking" was chosen because the recommended target group of the course are learners with at least intermediate proficiency in English.

The aim of the present paper is to briefly introduce the theoretical background of the production-oriented approach and the coursebook specifically written for this method. The second part of the paper is devoted to the discussion of the findings of this pilot project.

The production-oriented approach (POA)

POA has three main components: teaching principles, teaching hypothesis and teacher-mediated teaching process (Wen, 2016; Vettorel, 2018). The first component, teaching principles, is related to the teaching process itself and has three further subcomponents: the *"learning-centered principle"*, the *"learning-using integration principle"* and the *"whole-person education principle"*.

Learning centeredness suggests that every classroom activity should have a purpose and should be designed in a way that guarantees effective learning for students, and the teachers' role here is limited to facilitation. The *learning-using principle* holds that learning should take place while using the target language. This posits that it is not enough to learn a new linguistic element, learners have to be provided with the opportunity to put the newly acquired forms into practice in activities where the focus is on the productive skills. Such activities include speaking and writing activities, translation and even interpreting activities (Wen, 2016). Finally, the third subcomponent, *whole person education*, proposes that the aim of foreign language teaching is not only to enhance students' overall English language proficiency, but it also involves the improvement of learners' critical thinking skills, the strive for autonomous learning and the raise of cultural awareness (Wen, 2016; Ren – Wang, 2018). Here Wen (2016) underlines that this may be achieved by several ways, such as carefully selecting materials that foster intercultural competences and social responsibilities or using controversial topics to make a debate on, or simply using teamwork in class to encourage cooperation amongst learners.

The second main component is the teaching hypothesis, which has to do with teaching and is comprised of three sub-hypotheses (the *output-driven, input-driven, selective learning hypotheses*) (Wen, 2016). The *output-driven hypothesis* puts emphasis on the output in the language learning process and therefore each lesson starts and ends with a productive activity, too. This makes students realize that there are certain linguistic elements they lack and hopefully encourages them to put more effort in learning these linguistic

elements. Also, output tasks, where learners have to produce something (e.g. explain something to someone), are more likely to spark the interest and enthusiasm of students because this way they can use the language in situations resembling real life (Ren – Wang, 2018). The *input-enabling hypothesis* simply holds that all materials, even in the lead-in phase, should be related to the main productive activity thus providing as much input as possible. Learners can achieve better results if the teacher caters for their language level and provides learners with the appropriate linguistic input so that they can solve the output tasks where the focus is on the production of the target language. Finally, the *selective learning hypothesis*, which is closely related to the input-enabling hypothesis, suggests that the input materials should be chosen in a way that meets the need of the output tasks (Deng, 2018), i.e. all materials should contain relevant ideas and linguistic elements that students can use because research has shown that selective learning proves to be more efficient than non-selective learning (Miyawaki, 2012).

The third component is the teaching process itself, which involves the three stages of teaching through POA: *motivating, enabling* and *assessing* (Wen, 2016). In the first phase, the motivating phase, the teacher's role is to introduce and describe a communicative scenario which is challenging enough (but not threatening) for students and requires communication. This phase aims to arouse learners' interest in the topic thus preparing them for the next step, the enabling phase. Also in the motivating phase, learners try to resolve a given productive activity and realize their lack of certain required linguistic elements. This aims to motivate them to acquire the missing linguistic forms. In the next phase, the teacher gives an explanation on the linguistic form thus enabling students to understand and use it. At this point, students read and listen to and also use the given linguistic element while the teacher facilitates, monitors and provides assistance if needed. Finally, in the assessing phase, the students and the teacher negotiate the criteria of assessment in advance. After that, students submit their assignment which is assessed and evaluated by the teacher and then by the students themselves, too (Wen, 2016).

In order to provide teachers with suitable course materials, a supplementary coursebook series titled "*iEnglish*" was produced. For this pilot project, and in order to test the effectiveness of both the coursebook and POA itself, the coursebook "*iEnglish 1: viewing, listening and speaking*" was chosen for use and the main aim of this research project was to obtain insights into the effectiveness of the method in a non-Chinese context. The next sections aim to shed light on the methodology used as well as the findings of

this pilot project. The following section introduces the methods used in this study.

Methods

In this pilot project, the coursebook "*iEnglish 1: viewing, listening and speaking*" was piloted in three groups at Budapest Business School: University of Applied Sciences in the spring semester of the academic year 2018/19. Unit 6 (*Business and Business Strategy*) was chosen as the piloted unit of the book because it contains several business-related topics, which easily fit the syllabi of the courses of the Hungarian university where the coursebook was piloted. The findings of this pilot project include the analysis of Unit 6, as well as the course tutor's own reflections and experience based on his researcher's journal.

The participants

The pilot project was carried out at a renowned Hungarian university where all students specialize in a certain aspect of economics. The mother tongue of the participants, all of whom are either first or second year students enrolled in the above university, was Hungarian. The number of students participating in the research was 54 (N=54), with 19 students (n=19) specializing in IT and economics and 35 students (n=34) specialize in finance and accountancy. From these 35 (n=35) students, 18 (n=18) attend one group and 17 (n=17) attend another group. Altogether, these three groups of students were recruited for the study. In the group specializing in IT and economics (henceforth *Group A*), 17 participants are male, and only 2 participants are female. In the second group (henceforth *Group B*), from the 18 students (n=18), 2 (n=2) are male and 16 (n=16) are female. Finally, the last group (henceforth *Group C*) consists of 6 (n=6) male and 11 (n=11) female participants.

The description of the different groups

Group A (n=19) is a heterogeneous group, with different levels of English knowledge. More than half of the students have a relatively good command of English, whereas some of the students speak really poor English and encounter difficulties when it comes to expressing themselves freely. Therefore, during group and pair works, the groups and pairs had to be manipulated so that students with a lower level of English would be paired up with students with a higher level of English and this could facilitate group dynamics. Their level of English is between B1 and C1. All these students are

second year majors who study all their courses in Hungarian except for this English as a Foreign Language (henceforth EFL) course.

Table 1. The characteristics of each group

	group A	group B	group C
number of students	n=19	n=18	n=17
specialization	IT, finance	finance and accountancy	finance and accountancy
homogeneity, heterogeneity	heterogeneous	relatively homogeneous	relatively homogeneous
level of English	B1-C1	B1+	B1

Group B (n=18) and Group C (n=17) specialize in finance and accountancy and the group dynamics of these two groups are really similar. They are difficult to motivate and even though the group is relatively homogeneous, in group B there are two students whose command of English is poorer than that of the rest of the group. In group C, there are also two students who have difficulties expressing themselves. Similarly to group A, pairs and groups were also manipulated in order to facilitate group dynamics.

The method of coursebook analysis

In this section, I briefly introduce the method I used when analysing "*iEnglish 1: viewing, listening and speaking*". For the assessment of the book activities, I have used Tanner's and Green's (1998) typology, who identified four types of actions (change, remove, replace, add) that a teacher may take when using a coursebook. These four actions are summarized in Table 2 (Tanner – Green, 1998:122).

Table 2. Four actions when analysing a coursebook

Change	**Remove**
Make small changes to the existing material in the coursebook.	Remove a coursebook activity from the lesson.
Add	**Replace**
Add an extra activity in an area not covered sufficiently in the book.	Replace one activity with another related one which is more suitable.

The first action, *change*, refers to all the necessary or optional changes that course tutors or teachers consider important. They might alter a certain activity in order to be able to customize the material and cater for the needs

of their learners. The second action, *remove*, is closely related to the first one. When minor changes and alterations are not enough, it might be useful to skip or remove a certain activity because the focus might shift too much towards something less important in a particular lesson. As opposed to removing, we might also *add* certain activities that are missing from the coursebook or might not be paid sufficient attention to. This third action is relatively common since no coursebook is perfect and they have to be completed with extra tasks and activities every now and then. Finally, the last action is called *replacing,* when an activity is completely replaced with a similar one.

It is crucial to underline that, as previously mentioned, no coursebook is perfect and minor or even major alterations might be sufficient to be made by course tutors. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the coursebook does not meet the expectations of the course tutor, it simply suggests that coursebooks should be tailor-made and the needs of a given group of learners should be taken into consideration, and covered to the utmost extent. In other words, courses should be learner-centered, and not book-centered.

The researcher's journal

Besides the coursebook analysis, a researcher's journal was also kept during the course of the research. Based on Silverman (2005), *observation notes* were taken about my own experience about the lessons, and *personal notes* containing feeling statements were also taken. These personal notes were supplemented by other subjective comments of mine, too.

Results and discussion

The unit may be divided into several sections. It begins with a short warm-up activity, where students have to brainstorm on different companies and collect information about them. The second section focuses on listening and speaking and touches upon topics such as developing a business strategy and certain supermarket tricks. The third section is a viewing and speaking section in which learners are provided with information concerning the pricing strategy of a company. Finally, in the last section, students are required to cooperate and work in groups and their task is to write up a proposal about their own business and at the end, they have to share their ideas with the other groups.

Section 1: Warm-up

As previously mentioned, students work in groups and after a brainstorming session, they name certain companies and try to collect as much information

about them as possible. The time limit was set to 10 minutes, and students were assigned to groups.

In group A, possibly because they specialize in IT and finance, most of the students listed companies related to the IT industry (e.g. Apple). They managed to come up with ideas relatively quickly – within a few minutes – and they did not even use all of the allocated time. In groups B and C, however, students were reluctant to start working so constant monitoring was required in order to make them focus on the task. In group B, with a little help from the course tutor, students found companies and described them in a more or less detailed fashion. Group C failed to do this task and certain examples had to be provided to them and even then, they had difficulties finding information about the companies.

Section 2: Listening and speaking

After the introduction, Section 2 begins with the presentation of possible new vocabulary items. However, only the Chinese equivalents of these items were given, therefore the task had to be modified in order to fit the Hungarian context. A separate worksheet was created to introduce these vocabulary items to students. The original list of words was simply used and the Hungarian equivalents were provided for them on a separate sheet of paper. This proved to be extremely useful since all groups had plenty of unknown words from the list. After pre-teaching these vocabulary items, the next step was to listen to the first text and to answer the corresponding five questions. The questions did not seem to be specific enough since students had difficulties answering them, furthermore the length of the first listening text was 4.5 minutes. Either the length of the text should be reduced or the number of questions should be extended and simpler, more specific questions could be added. The second task was to listen to the text again, and complete a summary of the text. This kind of task is extremely beneficial for students because it enables them to read the text while listening to it, and therefore helps them understand what might have been difficult to comprehend for the first time. Also, it helps the course tutor to highlight the most important vocabulary items from the text and anticipate upcoming student questions at once.

The second listening was about the importance of developing a company strategy. Students had to complete an outline based on what they hear when listening to the text. Then in a "true or false" type of exercise, after listening to the text for the second time, learners had to decide whether the five statements given were true or false. This caused no difficulties for any of the groups. The last task in this section was another listening task about

supermarket tricks and how supermarkets are designed in order to make customers purchase more. Similarly to the previous tasks, students here also had to complete gaps while listening to the text.

Neither group had any problems with the above tasks, however, sometimes the recording had to be played more than once and sometimes even paused to give students time to write down their answers or to underline the important sections. Moreover, even though these three tasks were supplemented with discussion questions, only group A was talkative enough to make these sessions meaningful. Groups B and C were reluctant to give answers unless individual students were picked upon and requested to talk.

Section 3: Viewing and speaking

The third section consists of two subsections, both of which begin with a list of English vocabulary items with their Chinese equivalents. Similarly to the previous section, a separate worksheet was created with the Hungarian equivalents to help students understand the words and expressions.

In the first task, students watch a video and in the meantime, they complete a text with what they hear. This task was easy for every group because they only had to pay attention to certain vocabulary items. After that, in the second task, there were questions students had to answer. These questions, as opposed to the questions of the previous task, were more specific, therefore easier for students to answer. The speaking activity was deliberately left out in groups B and C because previous experience had shown that in group A, even though students were asked to work in small groups, they did not seem to have any ideas and refused to have meaningful conversations with each other, therefore students were picked upon at random and their opinions were asked. In the second task, students had to watch another video. There were six questions with multiple choice answers in which students were required to find the right answer. The solutions of the students in this task were almost error-free in the three groups but the second part of it, where gaps had to be completed, caused certain difficulties. Sometimes students indicated that they could not hear the word or could not spell them correctly. As far as the speaking activity is concerned, it was completely left out because of the lack of students' interactivity.

Section 4: Project

The last section was a project within the framework of which students had to make a business proposal. Before this proposal, which was to be presented in front of the whole group, students were required to review and evaluate their

experiences and resources first: they had to carry out market research, etc. This activity was deliberately left out because all these students had already done this both in Hungarian and in English in their very first semester at university.

Conclusion

"iEnglish" is indeed a really modern coursebook that aims to exploit the technological opportunities (e.g. videos). However, it is a bit repetitive when it comes to the types of tasks it presents, and even though each section contains a speaking activity, there is no real need for students to communicate with each other, i.e. there was no information gap. Students, therefore, often refused to answer the listed questions and frequently replied with "I don't know". These types of activities could be redesigned in order to encourage and motivate learners to speak and express their views on a certain topic. All in all, the topics of the book are interesting and up-to-date. However, the design of the activities lacks variety which sometimes makes the lesson dull, therefore certain sections could be revisited.

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