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„The Four Language Skills in Austrian
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EFL	English as a foreign language
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
L1	first language
L2	second language

1 INTRODUCTION

The four language skills listening, speaking, reading and writing are the pillars of any language. It follows, that they are a key element in language learning and thus an integral part of any language classroom.

The present thesis, which is divided into two parts, is concerned with the four language skills in Austrian English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms. The first part is concerned with theory and investigates the dimensions of listening, speaking, reading and writing with regard to language teaching. The second part is dedicated to the presentation and the analysis of this thesis' empirical study which aims to investigate the occurrence and distribution of the four skills in Austrian English lessons by means of classroom observations and teacher interviews.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the most important language teaching approaches of the last century and investigates the position of the four skills within the Grammar-Translation Method, the Direct Method, the Reading Approach, the Oral-Situational Approach, Audiolingualism, the Cognitive Approach, the Affective-Humanistic Approach, the Comprehension-based Approach and Communicative Language Teaching.

Chapter 3 offers a brief summary of the historical development of each of the skills and shows how the status of listening, speaking, reading and writing changed in the course of time.

Chapter 4 is then dedicated to the four language skills. Within this part of the paper various dimensions of each skill will be addressed. Furthermore, the different sub-skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing will be described, as they build the basis of this thesis' classroom observations.

As this paper is concerned with Austrian EFL classrooms, chapter 5 is dedicated to the Austrian curriculum and provides information about the representation of the four skills within this prescriptive document.

Chapter 6 is the first chapter concerned with the empirical study. It therefore includes a description of the method, the procedure and the context of the classroom observations as well as the teacher interviews.

In the penultimate chapter, chapter 7, the results of this thesis' study concerned with the occurrence and distribution of the four language skills in Austrian EFL classrooms will be presented and discussed.

Finally, chapter 8 provides a summary and conclusion of the entire thesis.

2 THE FOUR LANGUAGE SKILLS IN EFL TEACHING METHODS & APPROACHES

Changes in language teaching methods throughout history have reflected recognition of changes in the kind of proficiency learners need, such as a move toward oral proficiency rather than reading comprehension as the goal of language study. (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 3)

In order to illustrate this process of change, the following chapter will describe the basics of some of the best-known language teaching approaches of the twentieth century. Furthermore, a look will be taken at the status of the four language skills within the different approaches in order to show that in the past listening, speaking, reading and writing have not always been regarded as equally important.

2.1.1 Grammar-Translation Method

The grammar-translation method to language teaching, which developed at the beginning of the nineteenth-century, is based on the study of Latin. Language, within this method, is regarded as being a descriptive set of finite rules and the teaching syllabus is thus almost exclusively based on grammar and lexical items (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 4 and Flowerdew & Miller 2005: 4).

The main goal of learning a language by means of the grammar-translation method is, as Richards and Rodgers (2001: 5-6) find, the ability to read its literature. Furthermore, translation of isolated sentences into and out of the second language is central to this method so that “[t]he first language is maintained as the reference system in the acquisition of the second language” (Stern 1983: 455). That is to say, the medium of instruction is the learners’ first language, which “is used to explain new items and to enable comparisons to be made between the foreign language and the student’s native language” (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 6). Overall, a focus on accuracy is stressed within the grammar-translation method because the students should strive for a high standard in translation.

With regard to grammar, rules are taught deductively, introduced in an organized sequence and practiced by doing translation exercises. Vocabulary is acquired by means of bilingual lists, which only consist of words found in the reading texts dealt with in class.

Considering the four language skills, it appears that reading and writing are the central skills within this language teaching method, as the learners are constantly

engaged in translating texts from one language to the other (Lightbown & Spada 2013: 126 & Richards & Rodgers 2001: 6). This dedication to literature and the written language entails neglect towards spoken language and communication. It follows that students neither receive oral nor aural practice and consequently do not acquire speaking or listening skills in the target language (Finocchiaro & Brumfit 1988: 4 & Celce-Murcia 2001: 6).

2.1.2 Direct Method

The direct method developed as a reaction to the grammar-translation method and is based on natural language learning principles. It is an aural-oral method which stresses that “learners can best learn what is ‘natural’ to them” (Flowerdew & Miller 2005: 5) and as such completely contrasts with the grammar-translation method.

In general, scholars in favor of this method believed that “language could be taught without translation or the use of the learner’s native language if meaning was conveyed directly through demonstration and action” (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 11).

It follows that the direct method is a monolingual approach that stresses the exclusive use of the target language in the classroom and aims at encouraging the learners to use the target language spontaneously. Therefore, learners are exposed to vocabulary and sentences of everyday use only and acquire these by means of actions and pictures or association of ideas. Communication skills are fostered by the acquisition of speaking skills through question-and-answer exchanges. Additionally, an emphasis on correct pronunciation and grammar, which is taught inductively, is part of the direct method, within which new subject matters are always presented verbally (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 11-12).

Although the direct method stresses the importance of communication skills and as such provides a new perspective on language teaching, critics believe that this method fails to recognize the differences between naturalistic first and foreign language acquisition. Moreover, it is claimed that this language teaching method does not take into account the realities of a classroom and is difficult to implement in practice as all teachers would have to be native speakers or at least would need to be native like in the target language (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 12-13).

With regard to the language skills, it appears that the focus of this method is on listening and speaking rather than on reading and writing (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 12). This does, however, not imply that the latter two are completely disregarded. Writing is often part of the language classroom from the first day because it is believed that language acquisition is supported by this supplementary mode of perception. Hence learners exposed to the direct method are able to write the words and expressions that they can use in communication. This means that the learners acquire speaking and writing skills simultaneously, and consequently also learn to read what they can say and write. Reading is, however, for a long time, not concerned with any texts but limited to the words written on the blackboard and thus a rather neglected skill (Diller 1978: 79-80).

2.1.3 Reading Approach

In the 1920s some British as well as American educators advocated a new approach, the Reading Approach. This method stresses the importance of text comprehension and as such “restricts the goal of language teaching to training in reading comprehension” (Stern 1983: 460). This emphasis on reading was recommended because reading was regarded as being the most useful and easiest language skill to acquire for beginners (Stern 1983: 460).

Therefore a systematic approach to teaching and learning this skill has been developed over a period of decades. Graded readers have been devised and teachers taught their subjects by using books with short reading passages in the target language supported by preceding vocabulary lists facilitating understanding. The goal of these readings was the acquisition of rapid silent reading ability but in practice this was disregarded by many teachers who instead discussed the content of the readings with their students (Stern 1983: 461 and Richards & Rodgers 2001: 50).

Overall, reading, obviously, receives most attention within this second language teaching method and can be regarded as the only skill emphasized. Nevertheless, this does not imply that speaking is completely neglected. The introduction of new items in the second language happens orally as it does in the direct method. Furthermore, just as the grammar-translation approach, the reading approach allows the use of the first language for instruction (Stern 1983: 461).

As part of the acquisition of reading competence, students receive training in “intensive reading for detailed study and extensive rapid reading of graded ‘readers’ for general comprehension” (Stern 1983: 461).

In sum, the reading approach has not reinvented the wheel but introduced some new elements to language teaching which are still of relevance today. These are

(a) the possibility of devising techniques of language learning geared to specific purposes, in this case the reading objective; (b) the application of vocabulary control to second language texts, as a means of better grading of texts; (c) the creation of graded ‘readers’; and (d) thanks to vocabulary control, the introduction of techniques of rapid reading to the foreign language classroom. (Stern 1983: 462)

2.1.4 Audiolingualism

Audiolingualism is a teaching method that emerged in the United States by the mid-1950s triggered by the growth of interest in language teaching. The underlying theory of this teaching method can be traced back to structural linguistics, “which argues that speech is to have priority in language learning, as the primary medium of language is oral” (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 55). That is to say, Audiolingualism is a teaching method with the objective of oral proficiency and the goal of enabling students to effectively and efficiently master the target language (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 53-58).

Besides structural linguistics, this method is influenced by principles of behaviorism. As such it considers the formation of good linguistic habits which students acquire by means of pattern practice as necessary for effective language learning (Musumeci 2009: 45).

Overall, the Audiolingual method strives at teaching the language instead of teaching about the language and regards foreign language learning as a process of mechanical habit formation. Learners acquire language skills by means of memorizing dialogues and performing pattern drills. The medium of instruction is the target language and the items to be acquired by the learners are always presented in spoken prior to written form.

In practice this means that the focus in the early stages is on oral skills, with gradual links to other skills as learning develops. Oral proficiency is equated with accurate pronunciation and grammar and the ability to respond quickly and accurately in speech situations. The teaching of listening

comprehension, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary are all related to development of fluency. Reading and writing skills may be taught, but they are dependent on prior oral skills. (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 58)

In more precise terms Brooks (1964) differentiates between short and long-range Audiolingual objectives. As for his view, “[s]hort-range objectives include training in listening comprehension, accurate pronunciation, recognition of speech symbols as graphic signs on the printed page and ability to reproduce these symbols in writing” (Brooks 1964: 110). That is to say, learners need

first, control of the structure of sounds, form and order in the new language; second, acquaintance with vocabulary items that bring content into these structures; and third, meaning in terms of the significance these verbal symbols have for those who speak the language natively. (Brooks 1964: 111)

Accordingly, the ultimate goal, and as such the long range-objective of the Audiolingual method is to enable students to use the target language just as any native speaker. (Brooks 1964: 107) Therefore, this teaching method acknowledges that language learning and teaching should not be concerned with the language system only but also consider the target language speakers’ cultural system. Nevertheless, critics find that Audiolingualism does not pay much attention to communication but rather focuses on habit formation by means of endless drills (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 57 and Brinton & Brinton 2010: 374).

The four skills in the Audiolingual method to language teaching are taught in a specific order, namely, first listening, second pronunciation training and speaking, then reading and last writing. That is to say, spoken language is introduced prior to written language. The first skill to be acquired is listening which is mainly regarded as the ability of aural discrimination of fundamental sound patterns. The training of listening ability is in many cases supported by tape recorders as well as audiovisual tools as these allow non-native teachers to expose their students to accurate dialogue and drill models typical of this method (Richards & Rodgers: 52-53, 59, 63).

2.1.5 Oral-Situational Approach

The Oral-Situational approach, which shows parallels to the Audiolingual method, was developed between the 1930s and the 1960s in Britain. At this time linguists such as Harold Palmer and Albert Sidney Horny showed great interest in language teaching methodology. By means of developing “systematic approaches to the lexical

and grammatical content of a language course” (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 38) they paved the way for this approach, which became widely accepted by the 1950s (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 36-38).

In general, the Oral-Situational approach regards speech as the basis of language and as such puts strong emphasis on oral practice. Therefore, students are taught in the target language only and material is, at first, always presented orally. In addition, this approach to language teaching views structure as being indispensable in speaking skills acquisition and therefore assigns an important role to inductive grammar and sentence patterns (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 39-40, 47).

What is special about the Oral-Situational approach is “[t]he theory that knowledge of structures must be linked to [the context and] situations in which they could be used” (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 40). In practice this means that, new aspects of language are always presented and practiced relating to a specific situation. Learners are “expected to deduce the meaning of a particular structure or vocabulary item from the situation in which it is presented. Extending structures and vocabulary to new situations takes place by generalization” (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 41). Hence, students are expected to acquire and, in the end, command an essential vocabulary in order to be able to use the target language in real-life situations (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 39-41).

With regard to the four language skills Oral-Situational language teaching wants its students to acquire a practical command of all four strands, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Nevertheless, oral language has priority over written language, which means that reading and writing are only introduced after the establishment of a solid basis in lexis and grammar (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 39, 41 & Celce-Murcia 2001: 7).

2.1.6 Cognitive Approach

The Cognitive approach to language teaching developed in the mid-sixties, as an alternative to the Audiolingual method. However, it did not introduce any outstanding new practice techniques. Instead it “loosened the tight hold that the Audiolingual method had exercised on materials and practice and [...] removed the stigma that had been placed on grammar-translation and direct method practices” (Stern 1983:

469). In general terms, this approach which according to Celce-Murcia (2001: 7) is influenced by cognitive psychology and Chomskyan linguistics, promotes the belief that learning a language, which is regarded as a coherent and meaningful system, is a conscious competence acquisition. Learners are therefore expected to acquire the target language in all its manifestations in order to be able to use it in real-life situations.

As such the Cognitive approach does not aim at any automatic command of the target language nor does it include endless habit-formation drills. Students within this approach are expected to understand the language as a system and are to acquire knowledge by meaningful material practice (Stern 1983: 469-470). To this end, grammar teaching, whether deductive (first rules, then practice) or inductive (first practice, then/no rules) must be part of the language classroom (Celce-Murcia 2001: 7).

Overall, language learning within the cognitive approach is regarded as rule learning and no longer associated with behavioristic habit formation by conditioning, shaping and reinforcement (Stern 1983: 470). In this spirit, Diller (1978) formulated the following four cognitivist principles which mark a clear difference to the Audiolingual method.

First, the cognitivist approach believes that any “living language is characterized by rule-governed creativity” (Diller 1978: 23), and should as such be regarded as a system that is to be acquired with conscious effort.

Second, “[t]he rules of grammar are psychologically real” (Diller 1978: 26) which implies that “[k]nowing a rule and being able to act on it is quite independent of being able to formulate the rule adequately” (Diller 1978: 27).

Third, “[a] living language is a language in which we can think” (Diller 1978: 34). As a result of this inseparability of learning a language and thinking in a language meaningfully and guided practice is to be preferred over drills so that learners acquire the ability to think in the target language (Diller 1978: 37).

Fourth and last, “[m]an is specially equipped to learn languages” (Diller 1978: 29). Everyone possesses the ability to acquire a new language but is responsible for his or her success. The cognitive approach emphasizes this by a great deal of individualized instruction with the students being responsible for their progress in learning the target language. With this focus on individual responsibility, the cognitive

approach regards errors as being part of the learning process and does not strive at perfection (Celce-Murcia 2001: 7).

Regarding the language skills the cognitive approach does not pay specific attention to only one or two skills, but stresses the need of all four branches to develop target language proficiency.

2.1.7 Affective-Humanistic Approach

The Affective-Humanistic approach is another perspective to language teaching that puts the learner as a 'whole' person into the center of attention. It regards language learning as personal development and not only as an accumulation of knowledge about the language. Learners, in affective-humanistic methodologies, should experience language learning as something positive and should enjoy practicing the target language. To achieve this positive association with language learning, activities in the humanistic approach are often student-centered. That is, the mostly interactive tasks in this approach are related to the learners' interests, their lives or relationships and as such meaningful to each individual (Harmer 1991: 35-36).

Apart from that, a good class atmosphere is regarded as more important than materials or methods and thus it is emphasized that each individual should be treated with respect and peers should support each other in their learning (Celce-Murcia 2001: 7-8).

In general, it appears that not only new grammar and vocabulary activities meeting the objectives of the Affective-Humanistic approach have been developed but that some researchers even provided entire methodologies, such as Community Language Learning, Suggestopedia, The Silent Way or Total Physical Response (Harmer 1991: 36).

Community Language Learning (CLL) is a language teaching method developed by Charles A. Curran, which "attempts to give students only the language they need" (Harmer 1991: 36). It "draws on the counseling metaphor to redefine the roles of the teacher (the *counselor*) and learners (the *clients*) in the language classroom" [original emphasis] (Richards & Rodgers 1986: 113). This relationship implies that the teacher is regarded as the knower while the students are viewed as the learners. Overall, CLL is a combination of innovative and conventional learning activities including

translation, group work, recording, transcription, analysis, reflection and observation, listening and free conversation (Richards & Rodgers 1986:113, 120).

Another Affective-Humanistic method is Suggestopedia which was developed by Georgi Lozanov, a Bulgarian psychiatrist-educator. This method wants the students to be comfortable and relaxed and thus “the decoration, furniture, and arrangement of the classroom, the use of music, and the authoritative behavior of the teacher” (Richards & Rodgers 1986: 142) are characteristics of it. Apart from that, each student receives a new name and a new biography in the target language’s culture. (Richards & Rodgers 1986: 148-149) In sum, Suggestopedia promotes “that the general ease of the situation, the adoption of a new identity and the dependence on listening to [...] dialogues will help the students to acquire the language” (Harmer 1991: 36).

The Silent Way, a further Humanistic method, “is based on the premise that the teacher should be silent as much as possible in the classroom and the learner should be encouraged to produce as much language as possible” (Richards & Rodgers 1986: 99). The method developed by Caleb Gattegno is similar to traditional approaches such as Situational or Audiolingual language teaching but assigns an indirect role to the teacher and places more responsibility on the student. It emphasizes the importance of acquiring native-like fluency as well as accurate pronunciation and focuses on the propositional meaning of language units rather than their communicative value (Richards & Rodgers 1986: 101,103). Overall, the Silent way regards silence as the best precondition for language acquisition as “in silence students concentrate on the task to be accomplished and the potential means to its accomplishment. [...] Silence [...] is thus an aid to alertness, concentration, and mental organization” (Richards & Rodgers 1986: 102).

Total Physical Response (TPR), a further Affective-Humanistic language teaching method, was developed by James Asher. It is a method that “attempts to teach language through physical (motor) activity” (Richards & Rodgers 1986: 87). Learners, acquire language by means of actions and physical response instead of drills. That is to say, students carry out their teacher’s commands physically before producing any verbal responses and are not forced to speak before they feel ready to do so (Richards & Rodgers 1986: 87, 93 and Harmer 1991: 36).

In sum, all teaching methods belonging to the Affective-Humanistic approach do not primarily focus on skills acquisition but put the learner into the center of attention and regard language learning as a self-actualization process (Celce-Murcia 2001: 8).

2.1.8 Comprehension-Based Approach

The Comprehension Approach is based on the belief that, in language acquisition, comprehension is prior to production as “[c]ommunicative speech requires comprehension, but comprehension does not require speech” [original emphasis] (Olmsted Gary & Gary 1981 334). In this sense of comprehension being easier than speech, it is not oral but intensive comprehension practice which takes the entire classroom time at early stages of language acquisition. In this sense, listening comprehension precedes reading practice, which in general should be

limited lexically and structurally to what learners have already shown that they comprehend aurally. That is, they would read only what they have already heard. The reason for having aural comprehension precede visual comprehension is to prevent internalizations of incorrect representations through faulty sound-graphic correspondences. (Olmsted Gary & Gary 1981: 338-339)

Regarding the productive language skills speaking and writing, it is the latter that should be introduced first.

The reason for this has to do with the fact that speech requires the user to operate under time constraints, while writing allows the user to control the rate of encoding. Thus writing allows the learner to match the rate of production with his competence. Speech, on the other hand, forces the learner into a more rapid organization of linguistic material and may fail to give him time to use fully what competence he has. (Olmsted Gary & Gary 1981: 340)

Students should therefore start their language learning “by listening to meaningful speech and by responding nonverbally in meaningful ways before they produce any language themselves” (Celce-Murcia 2001: 8) and should at no point feel forced to speak. They should receive input one level beyond their actual competence and may acquire rules to reflect upon what they do.

To sum up, the Comprehension-Based Approach aims at enabling its students to understand and make themselves understood and regards listening as the fundamental skill that will allow the development of speaking, reading and writing skills (Celce-Murcia 2001: 8).

2.1.9 Communicative Approach

The language teaching approach of most relevance to the present, the communicative approach, developed out of the communicative movement after the 1970s. It marks the beginning of a change of paradigm, focusing on the communicative aspects of language rather than the mastery of language structures (Howatt & Widdowson 2004: 326 and Richards & Rodgers 2001: 151-153). It follows that “a concept of what it means to know a language and to be able to put that knowledge to use in communicating with people in a variety of settings and situations” (Hedge 2000: 45) is one of its bases. CLT as such aims at the individual’s development of communicative competence which Hymes defined as “a knowledge of the rules for understanding and producing both the referential and social meaning of language” (Paulston 1992: 38).

According to Richards and Rodgers (2001: 161) Communicative Language Teaching comprises the following set of characteristics:

1. Language is a system for the expression of meaning.
2. The primary function of language is to allow interaction and communication.
3. The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses.
4. The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse.

Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983: 91-93) further regard the following features as being representative of the communicative approach: (referred to in Richards & Rodgers 2001: 156-157)

- Meaning is paramount
- Dialogs, if used, center around communicative functions and are not normally memorized.
- Contextualization is a basic premise.
- Language learning is learning to communicate.
- Effective communication is sought.
- Drilling may occur, but peripherally.
- Comprehensible pronunciation is sought.

- Any device that helps learners is accepted- varying according to their age, interest, etc.
- Attempts to communicate may be encouraged from the very beginning.
- Judicious use of native language is accepted where feasible
- Translation may be used where students need or benefit from it.
- Reading and writing can start from the first day, if desired.
- The target linguistic system will be learned best through the process of struggling to communicate.
- Communicative competence is the desired goal (i.e. the ability to use the linguistic system effectively and appropriately).
- Linguistic variation is central concept in materials and methodologies.
- Sequencing is determined by any consideration of content, function, or meaning that maintains interest.
- Teachers help learners in any way that motivate them to work with the language.
- Language is created by the individual, often through trial and error.
- Fluency and acceptable language is a primary goal: Accuracy is judged not in the abstract but in the context.
- Students are expected to interact with other people, either in the flesh, through pair and group work, or in their writings.
- Intrinsic motivation will spring from an interest in what is being communicated by the language.

Besides these numerous components, three principles, namely the communicative, the task and the meaningfulness principle, can be ascribed to CLT. These imply that first, exercises involving real communication; second, assignments requiring the usage of language to carry out meaningful tasks, and third, language meaningful to the learners, assist the language learning process (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 161).

Resulting from that, one can say that CLT acknowledges that communicative ability has to be acquired and does not automatically arise from a mere linguistic knowledge of language units (Howatt & Widdowson 2004: 327). As such CLT strives for authentic as well as meaningful communication and regards language learning as a creative trial-and-error process, with all language skills being of equal importance (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 172).

In sum, students acquiring a foreign language by means of this approach acquire all four language skills and are “given the opportunity to practise and internalise not only grammatical structures but also discourse, sociocultural or strategic factors” (Byram & Méndez García 2009: 501).

3 HISTORY OF LISTENING, SPEAKING, READING AND WRITING IN ELT

Listening, speaking, reading and writing have received different attention within the above described teaching methods and approaches. In order to understand these shifts of attention, the following chapter will provide a short historical overview of the development of each skill.

3.1 Listening

Listening ability in English language teaching has, for a long time, only received little attention. It was believed that students’ listening skills would develop automatically simply through exposure to the target language by means of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation training. That is to say, listening has been regarded as a passive skill and as such been taken for granted and for long not been taught explicitly (Hedge 2000: 227f. and Osada 2004: 54).

A paradigm shift in teaching listening comprehension has been initiated by Rivers in the mid 1960s. She criticized the belief that only speaking constitutes communication and found that the teaching of listening skills is of great importance because there is no communication without comprehension (Osada 2004: 55).

Apart from Rivers, it was also Chomsky, who, in the late 1960s, contributed to change of status of listening “from being considered just a merely mechanical process of habit formation to a more dynamic and mentalistic process” (Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan 2006: 31). Just as Rivers, he believed that comprehension is essential and thus regarded listening “as the primary channel by which access could be gained to L2 input, while in turn serving as the trigger for acquisition” (Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan 2006: 31).

With these new insights, it was recognized during the Second International Association of Applied Linguistics Conference in 1969 that listening is a fundamental skill for language acquisition. Consequently, new theories and curricula have been developed and foreign language listening acquisition has become an important research area (Osada 2004: 55 and Rost 2001:8).

Nowadays, listening is regarded as an important vehicle for second language acquisition. It is no longer viewed as a passive skill but as an active receptive oral skill vital to language learning. Listening is, not as it was once supposed, mere comprehension but the result of the interaction of a number of information sources including acoustic input, linguistic knowledge, awareness of context and, of course, general world knowledge and as such requires a listener to make sense of the interlocutors message by means of any relevant and available information (Buck 2001: 3).

3.2 Speaking

In second language acquisition speaking is considered as the most challenging of the four language skills. It involves a complex meaning construction process and thus needs to be taught because otherwise learners will not be able to acquire communicative competence in the foreign language (Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan 2006: 139f.).

Nevertheless, the teaching of speaking and especially of spoken production has not received much attention throughout history. That is to say, speaking has long been a marginalized skill and often only been regarded as a “medium for providing language input, memorisation practice and habit-formation” (Bygate 2001: 14) instead of a tool for communication. Speaking “was mainly associated with pronunciation, and with getting new language noticed and integrated to the learner’s competence” (Bygate 2001: 15).

Fortunately, this view has changed so that speaking over time has become a fundamental area in foreign language teaching. Audiolingualism, which was a popular teaching approach during the 1950s and 60s, was “one of the first to offer a clear perspective on the teaching of oral skills” [... which] appreciated the importance of input before output” (Bygate 2001: 15). Within this approach “learning to speak a

language [...] followed a stimulus-response-reinforcement pattern [...]. In this pattern, speakers were first exposed to linguistic input as a type of external *stimulus* and their response consisted of imitating and repeating such input” [original emphasis] (Martínez-Flor, Usó-Juan & Alcón Soler 2006: 140). As such this approach, however, focused on pronunciation and grammatical accuracy rather than on spoken interaction.

In the 1970s and 80s it was recognized that the production of oral language involves complex cognitive processes and fulfills certain functions. “[S]poken language was no longer seen in terms of repeating single words or creating oral utterances in isolation, but rather as elaborating a piece of discourse (i.e., a text) that carried out a communicative function and was affected by the context” (Martínez-Flor, Usó-Juan & Alcón Soler 2006: 143). Resulting from this perspective, the new aim of teaching oral skills was to enable “learners to face the typical functions of oral language and to perform a range of speech acts appropriately, as well as to deal with commonly occurring real-life situations” (Martínez-Flor, Usó-Juan & Alcón Soler 2006: 145).

Due to the fact that communicative competence is the goal of nowadays language teaching, speaking has become of paramount importance in foreign language acquisition and consequently receives a considerable amount of attention in language classrooms (Martínez-Flor, Usó-Juan & Alcón Soler 2006: 146).

3.3 Reading

In nowadays multilingual and international society reading in a second or foreign language is one of the most important skills. Nevertheless, throughout history the view of reading has undergone some changes from traditionally being regarded as a passive process to becoming a receptive, interactive and productive skill (Grabe 2009: 49 and Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor 2006b: 261).

Up to the end of 1960s reading was regarded as a passive process in which the reader’s function was to decode and translate symbols printed on a page rather than constructing any meaning. “Comprehension of printed material was merely comprehension of speech produced by the reader since the ability to comprehend was regarded as an abstract operation” (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor 2006b: 262). It

follows that reading at that time was rather concerned with the development of decoding skills than with meaning comprehension.

This view of reading was then challenged by a number of researchers. That is to say, Chomsky's innatist theory of language learning and Goodman's (1965), Smith's (1971) and Krashen's (1988) belief of people acquiring reading competence by means of reading led to a change. Henceforth, teaching aimed at enabling students to become active readers who are able "to derive meaning from the text by predicting and guessing its meaning by using both their knowledge of language and their background knowledge" (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor 2006b: 264).

By the end of the 1970s and throughout the 1980s researchers became interested in reading processes and "found that reading was an *interactive* process, i.e., it was a dynamic interaction between the writer and the reader in which the reader creates meaning from the text by activating his stored knowledge and extending it with new information supplied by the text" [original emphasis] (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor 2006b: 265). Apart from that, sociolinguists found that reading is a social process which means that the meaning of a text is dependent on the cultural context. Overall, the view of reading changed from being a passive skill to being a communicative act and as such it is nowadays regarded as an essential skill influencing students' communicative ability (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor 2006b: 264-267).

3.4 Writing

Writing differs from the other language skills in the way that it has long been regarded as a language skill which does not have to be taught explicitly. "Instead, it was used as a support skill in language learning to, for example, practise handwriting, writing answers to grammar and reading exercises, and write dictation" (Reid 2001: 28). That is to say, up to the end of the 1960s writing was simply regarded as the orthographic representation of spoken language and a means for language practice (Martínez-Flor, Usó-Juan & Palmer-Silveira 2006: 384-385). In the 1970s the majority of writing programs was still not included independent text composition but rather focused on grammar and stressed accuracy. It was only at the beginning of the 1980s that changes in the way of teaching writing appeared. That is to say, "there was a shift from strictly controlled writing to guided writing: writing was limited to structuring sentences, often in direct answers to questions, or by combining

sentences” (Reid 2001: 28). Later on even accuracy became less important due to the fact that errors have been accepted as being part of the composition process and one’s development towards becoming a proficient writer. Writing has then been regarded as a process and the teaching of strategies helping students to achieve successful written communication has found its way into the classroom (Reid 2001: 28).

At the start of the twenty-first century, writing classrooms have achieved a more balanced perspective of composition theory; consequently new pedagogy has begun to develop: traditional teacher-centred approaches are evolving into more learner-centred courses, and academic writing is viewed as a communicative social act. (Reid 2001: 29)

In the last decades, with the emergence of communicative language teaching, writing steadily received more attention and is now regarded as a creative and socially constrained process facilitating the acquisition of communicative competence (Martínez-Flor, Usó-Juan & Palmer-Silveira 2006: 390, 394).

4 THE DIMENSIONS OF THE FOUR LANGUAGE SKILLS

People who are literate in a language have a number of different skills. They have, by definition, “the ability, coming from one's knowledge, practice, aptitude, etc., to do something well” (dictionary.com). That is to say, people fluent in a language are able to listen to different messages, speak with other people, and read and write different types of texts.

In other words they possess the four basic language skills of speaking, writing, listening and reading. Speaking and writing involve language production and are therefore often referred to as *productive skills*. Listening and reading, on the other hand, involve receiving messages and are therefore often referred to as *receptive skills*. (Harmer 1991: 16)

Of course, skills are also employed in combination. Language users often listen and speak simultaneously or also listen and read, write and read or speak and read at the same time. Moreover, competent language users can call upon numerous sub-skills in order to process the language they use and receive (Harmer 1991: 16-18).

With regard to these considerations, it follows that the development of the four language skills must be part of any EFL classroom. Language learners need

proficiency in listening, speaking, reading and writing because otherwise they will not be able to use the target language in its entire means.

In the following sections the dimensions of each of the four language skills, which are of relevance for language learning and teaching, will be examined in detail. Information about the knowledge, processes and components involved in producing or receiving language will be provided. Moreover, the most important listening, speaking, reading and writing sub-skills necessary for language processing will be described.

4.1 LISTENING

Listening is a receptive oral skill and is frequently used in conjunction with one of the other language skills. It is a complex process enabling people to understand spoken language and “the channel in which we process language in real time” (Rost 2001: 7). Hence, listening is not only comprehension but the result of an interaction of various information sources including acoustic input, linguistic knowledge, awareness of context and, of course, general world knowledge (Rost 2001: 7 & Buck 2001: 3).

In order to comprehend a spoken message, four main types of knowledge may be drawn on: *phonological* – the sound system; *syntactic* – how words are put together; *semantic* – word and propositional knowledge; and *pragmatic* – the meaning of utterances in particular situations [original emphasis]. (Flowerdew & Miller 2005: 30)

Phonological knowledge is of importance as it enables the listener to divide the spoken message into its individual component sounds. The smallest units of sound important for comprehension are phonemes of which English has 44. The ability to recognize these is necessary because it allows the listener to distinguish minimal pairs as for instance *fast* and *vast* (Flowerdew & Miller 2005: 30f.).

Another phonological aspect important for comprehension is word and sentence stress. English is a stress-timed language which implies that stressed syllables occur at regular intervals. Unstressed words in such languages are normally spoken faster so that the general rhythm can be maintained. These differences of stress are important for understanding and especially challenging for speakers of syllable-timed languages, as for instance French or Spanish, in which all syllables tend to be of the same length (Flowerdew & Miller 2005: 31-33).

Overall, authentic speech does not represent the standard version of a language but includes sounds running into each other, being reduced or even left out. Assimilation and elision cause blurred word boundaries and result in understanding problems for nonnative speakers as well as language students who often acquire words in isolation. Thus they face problems recognizing connected speech and need to receive training in understanding authentic speech (Flowerdew & Miller 2005: 33f.).

Syntactic knowledge is used to “establish the relationships between the words of a sentence and the meaning these relationships carry” (Flowerdew & Miller 2005: 35). That is to say, listeners use their syntactic knowledge to make sense of a message. They derive small units of meaning from larger ones and establish and interpret the relationships between them in order to create meaning (Flowerdew & Miller 2005: 35f.).

Semantics is “the study of meaning in language” (Yule 2010: 113) and thus **semantic knowledge**, which also plays a role in syntactic processing, is the knowledge of the meaning of individual words and their relationships in a sentence. Nevertheless, semantic knowledge is not only needed to process single words and sentences but also used to determine the relationships of propositions and consequently necessary to establish a coherent text (Flowerdew & Miller 2005: 38f.).

“Communication clearly depends on not only recognizing meaning of words in an utterance, but recognizing what speakers mean by their utterances” (Yule 2010: 127). Thus **pragmatic knowledge** is needed in listening because it “involves an understanding of the function or illocutionary force of a spoken utterance in a given situation, as well as the sociopragmatic factors necessary to recognize not just what that utterance says, in linguistic terms, but also what is meant by it” (Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan 2006a: 38). It follows that listeners need contextual knowledge and further need an ability to make sense of situational and participant variables as well as politeness issues to achieve a complete understanding of a spoken text (Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan 2006a: 38).

All the above-described types of knowledge are required for **bottom-up** and **top-down** processing in listening. These are simultaneous and mutually dependent processes which take place at numerous cognitive organization levels (Rost 2001: 7 & Hedge 2000: 234).

“Bottom-up processing in listening entails the perception of sounds and words in a speech stream. When there is adequate perception of lexical information, listeners can use their background knowledge to interpret the input” (Vandergrift & Goh 2009: 399). This means that in the bottom-up listening process, listeners “segment speech into identifiable sounds and impose a structure on these in terms of words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and intonation patterns” (Hedge 2000: 230). Furthermore, clues of whatever kind are used to identify sounds, impose structure, infer meaning and make anticipation so that in the end the message can be decoded (Hedge 2000: 230f.).

In contrast to bottom-up, top-down processing in listening does not relate to knowledge of the language but “refers to the use of expectations in order to infer what the speaker may have said or intended to say” (Rost 2006: 53). That is to say, in top-down processing listeners use contextual clues as well as schematic knowledge, also called ‘inside the head’ knowledge, to infer meaning. Schematic knowledge or in simpler terms prior information consists of schemata which are “pre-packaged patterns of background knowledge that we have stored in memory from prior experiences” (Rost 2006: 63). These patterns are either formal schemata “derived from our knowledge of the structure of discourse genres, e.g., an academic lecture, a sermon” (Lynch 2006: 93) or content schemata which “are networks of knowledge on different topics, for example, ‘cooking’, comprising knowledge gained from a range of sources and also personal experience” (Lynch 2006: 93). Furthermore, scripts, which can be described as knowledge of situation routines stored in our minds, enable top-down listening processing. Overall, prior knowledge of any kind will affect and assist listening comprehension (Hedge 2000: 232-233).

To sum up, listening to a foreign language is a challenging task. Uncertainties regarding speech sounds and patterns, language and syntax or the recognition of content are common. Apart from that, environmental factors such as noise or interruption often lead to difficulties in understanding a message. Therefore, language learners need continuous practice in listening to real life speech as well as recorded material in order to become proficient listeners (Hedge 2000: 236).

4.1.1 Listening Sub-Skills

Listening, as outlined above, is a complex process requiring various types of knowledge and a considerable amount of training. Becoming a competent listener in a second or foreign language includes the mastery of various sub-skills which will be described in the following chapter.

Listening to the Teacher/ other Student(s) vs. Recorded Material

Listening in classroom settings is not only listening to recorded material, often especially designed for educational purposes, but also listening to 'live' speakers, namely the teacher or other students. In fact, the former, which is usually associated with the listening skill, is not as frequent as the latter. Students listen to teacher instructions and explanations in every lesson and also need to listen to their fellows on a regular basis but are not regularly exposed to recorded speech. It follows that it is not only listening to recorded material but also real-life listening which allows students to practice listening skills and consequently enhance their listening competence (Underwood 1993: 94f.).

Overall, both types have their advantages and disadvantages. In real-life listening the listener is able to see and observe the speaker and can consequently take advantage of non-verbal signs as for instance facial expressions, gestures or body movement. Likewise the speaker is able to see the listener and is thus enabled to adjust his/her speech to the needs of the listener. This means that the speaker is able to react to problems of understanding by means of reformulations or further explanations. Apart from that, listening to people in person does not require any technical equipment and overall it is almost always easier to understand a present speaker than a recorded voice. However, as conversational exchange happens in real time it can also be challenging because the text produced can only be heard once and has to be processed at a speed determined by the speaker. That is to say, there is no chance to stop, go back and re-listen because when repeating something, speakers normally do not use the same words but instead restate what they have said (Underwood 1993: 95 and Buck 2001: 6).

With regard to recorded material, it can be noted that listening to audio- and videotapes allows students to experience a great variety of listening practice. The usage of recorded material enables learners to listen to texts of many kinds such as

speeches, reports or conversations between two or several people. Furthermore, by means of using recordings it is possible to expose students to native speakers or to make them familiar with different accents. Moreover and in contrast to conversational listening, one-way listening allows the listener to listen to one and the same message several times so that in the end understanding should be guaranteed. Nevertheless, when listening to recordings it is not possible to guess meaning from non-verbal cues because tapes do not provide any paralinguistic features. Therefore, it is extremely important to concentrate on what can be heard in order to understand the message (Underwood 1993: 95f. & Buck 2001: 6).

Overall, both types of listening do occur in everyday life and thus students should receive practice in real-life as well as recorded material listening.

Non-participatory vs. Interactive Listening

Listening cannot be divided into real-life listening and listening to recorded material only but also be classified on the basis of the degree of interaction between the interlocutors. That is to say, listening can either be non-collaborative or interactive. In non-collaborative listening situations listeners only have to interpret the speakers' utterances while interactive listening requires collaboration in form of clarification requests, responses to interactional language, back-channeling, or turn-taking organization. Therefore, as Buck (2001: 12) finds, it is possible to view listening as a continuum of no interaction to a high degree of collaboration.

At one end is the situation where there is no possibility of an interaction: listening to the radio, television or a lecture are examples of this. Other situations, such as classrooms or presentations, are mainly one-way, but there is some chance to ask for clarification questions, or to intervene. Further along the continuum would be a situation where a group of people talk together, with one person doing most of the talking, and others listening and saying very little, but able to intervene if they wished. At the other end of the continuum, there is a truly interactive conversation between two people, who collaborate equally to maintain the conversation, taking turns to speak equal rights to participate.

This means that participatory listening, in contrast to non-collaborative listening, requires collaboration which often results challenging for L2 listeners as there is only limited time to process the oral input and to monitor one's understanding of the information provided (Field 2008: 69-70).

Listening to an Audio-File vs. a Video

With regard to non-collaborative listening a distinction must be made between audio-recordings and video files. Although both are one-way media allowing listeners to engage with a variety of listening situations, speakers, voices and accents, they require a different degree of attention on the part of the listeners.

Listening to audio recording demands a higher degree of attention because the listener is not able to see the speaker and thus has to concentrate on what s/he hears in order to understand the entire message. The advantage of these recordings compared to real speech, however, is the possibility of continuous replay. This allows listeners to clarify understanding problems by means of going back over particular parts of the text at any time and as often as necessary (Buck 2001: 6).

Videos are similar to audio recordings. However, they do not only provide audible input but also visual cues which “is a help to the viewer-listener, who either sees the speaker and so gets help in understanding what is being said [...] or sees scenes which relate to the topic being spoken about and so gets help in contextualising the utterances” (Underwood 1993: 5-6).

Listening for Gist vs. Specific Information vs. Detail

With regard to the purpose of listening it is possible to differentiate three main types: listening for gist, listening for specific information and listening for details.

Listening for gist aims at an overall understanding of the content of the text. That is to say, the listener tries to get a general idea of the message. Listening for content is typically employed when listening to radio news or television programs (Mewald, Gassner & Sigott 2007: 8).

Listening for specific information is “listening to a text in order [to] find specific, predetermined items of information” (Cambridge University Press 2013). This type of listening is usually used when listening to airport announcements or weather forecasts.

In case someone aims at obtaining detailed information about an entire text or parts of it, listening for detail is required. The listener wants to gather as much detail as possible and will therefore listen to the text as many times as possible in order to not miss any important information. Texts people listen to in this way are poems or

witness statements (Mewald, Gassner & Sigott 2007: 9 and Cambridge University Press 2013).

4.2 SPEAKING

Speaking is “without doubt the most highly prized language skill” (Lado 1961: 239). It is a productive oral skill that is so much part of everyday life that it is often taken for granted. Nevertheless, its acquisition is highly demanding because “learning speaking, whether in a first or other language, involves developing subtle and detailed knowledge about why, how and when to communicate, and complex skills producing and managing interaction, such as asking a question or obtaining a turn” (Burns & Seidlhofer 2002: 211). Besides interaction skills, successful communication requires knowledge of routines, knowledge about topic management, negotiation skills and the ability to apply communication strategies. Acquiring the ability to make use of all these components of communication is a challenging task. However, they are essential for successful interaction and will therefore be looked at in greater detail below.

First and foremost, **interaction skills** “which involve the ability to use language in order to satisfy particular demands” (Bygate 1987: 7) are a must for successful communication. Speakers need to decide on what they say, how they express it, and whether or not they develop it while maintaining the desired relations with their interlocutors at the same time (Bygate 1987: 6).

It follows from this, that first, speech takes place under time pressure and second, conversation involves interpersonal dimensions. Therefore, speakers need to master processing as well as reciprocity conditions (Bygate 1987: 7).

The mastery of process conditions is of importance as it enables speakers to produce speech at a normal speech while being under time pressure. That is to say, covers one of the basic skills needed for successful communication as it allows speakers to elaborate a specific topic while being listened to (Bygate 1987: 8).

“The reciprocity condition of speech refers to the relation between the speaker and listener in the process of speech” (Bygate 1987: 8). It allows the distinction between situations in which the speaker as well as the hearer have speaking rights and situations in which only the speaker is allowed to speak. Overall, it affects speech

because any participant in a conversation is addressee and decision-maker at the same time and needs to make sure that the conversation works. (Bygate 1987: 8)

In sum, this implies that successful communication is possible only, if speakers know how to deal with time pressure and if they are sensitive to their listeners in reciprocal exchange (Bygate 1987: 8).

Apart from these skills, speakers should have **knowledge of routines**, which are conventional and thus predictable ways of presenting information. Generally, there are two different types of routines, namely information routines and interaction routines.

Information routines, which do also exist in written language, are “frequently recurring types of information structures, including stories; descriptions of places and people; presentation of facts; comparisons; instructions” (Bygate 1987: 23) Overall, information routines can be expository or evaluative.

Expository routines are those which involve factual information hinging on questions of sequencing or identity of the subject. Evaluative routines are often, if not always, based on expository routines. They involve the drawing of conclusions, usually requiring the expressions of reasoning. Evaluative routines typically involve explanations; predictions; justifications; preferences and decisions. (Bygate 1987: 23-24)

Interaction routines are in contrast to information routines, not entirely based on content but relate to “sequences of kinds of terms occurring in typical kinds of interactions” (Bygate 1987: 25) as for instance service encounters, phone calls or conversations at parties.

Besides the knowledge of information and interaction routines, speakers need a variety of skills to manage these routines in a way that comprehension is achieved. In general, this involves two important dimensions, namely management of interaction and negotiation of meaning.

The **management of interaction** within communication can be regarded as the “business of agreeing who is going to speak next, and what he or she is going to talk about” (Bygate 1987: 27). Hence, successful communication requires turn taking and topic management skills on the speaker’s as well as the listener’s part.

With regard to turn-taking Bygate (1987: 39) found that effective turn taking requires the following five abilities:

1. knowing how to indicate that one wishes to speak, by using appropriate phrases, sounds, or gestures
2. recognizing the exact moment to get a turn
3. knowing how to use proper turn structure to be able to finish one's turn properly
4. recognizing other people's signals of their wish to speak
5. knowing how to let others have a turn

As already mentioned, successful management of interaction does not only require skills in turn taking but also in topic management. That is to say, speakers have to be able to choose and manage different topics. As part of this, they have to be able to decide how and for how long a topic is developed and further need to recognize the right moments for topic shifts (Bygate 1987: 36; Hedge 2000: 268 and Burns & Seidlhofer 2002: 218).

Apart from that, **negotiation of meaning**, which refers to the ability to communicate ideas understandably, takes an important role in making oneself understood. Speakers require

an ability to negotiate [...] until the meaning is clear. Part of this will involve using achievement strategies, such as paraphrase or gesture, to explain things more clearly. However, it also involves knowing the language needed for checking whether or not a listener has understood and, as a listener, knowing the language needed for requesting clarification or repetition, or indicating comprehension. (Hedge 2000: 266)

That is to say, speakers need to make adjustments in interaction by employing different techniques and strategies in order to ensure mutual understanding. They need to choose a level of detail appropriate for the audience because being too explicit or not explicit enough may confuse the listeners or even result in a breakdown of the conversation. Successful interaction, however, does not only require a contribution from the speaker but also from the listener. Listeners need to provide back-channel cues, as for instance sounds like “yeah” or “ah”, or non-verbal signals such as head nodding or shoulder shrugging, to let the speaker know that they are attending because otherwise a conversation is likely to fail (Flowerdew & Miller 2005: 54 and Bygate 1987: 27, 29, 31, 34).

In addition to the many aspects discussed above, pronunciation takes up an important role in both, transactional and interactional speech. That is to say, the usage of speech sounds and patterns for communication influence comprehension.

Speakers chunk their utterances into so-called tone units by means of pitch movement. These tone groups indicate the parts that belong together and provide signposts which enable the listener to process the input.

Another aspect of pronunciation influencing the success of communication is prominence. This implies that speakers modify their speech melody to highlight what is important. They highlight significant syllables by means of pitch movement and further increase the loudness of sounds and the length of vowels. Furthermore, content words carrying the meaning receive more prominence than function words as these mostly only indicate grammatical relations. Besides this, the modification of sounds by means of assimilation, elision and linking also affects comprehension. In addition, speakers' choice of tone is influenced by the knowledge, experiences, attitudes and emotions they think to share with their listeners. Speakers normally use two types of tones, namely "tones ending in a fall (that is, a 'fall' or 'rise-fall') for a part of the message which the speaker regards as part of the existing common ground, and tones ending in a rise ('fall-rise' and 'rise') for what they see as adding to the common ground" (Burns & Seidlhofer 2002: 222).

Overall, speaking "is an active process of negotiating meaning and of using social knowledge of the situation, the topic and the other speaker" (Burns & Joyce 1997: 14). Everyday talk is always situated in a specific cultural and social context which influences speakers' choice of language. Furthermore, the choice of speaking strategies is dependent on the purpose of the interaction (Burns & Seidlhofer 2002: and Burns & Joyce 1997: 14).

In addition "speaking does not always mean using grammatically complete and written-like sentences" (Burns & Joyce 1997: 14). Many spoken utterances are elliptic sentences or may even consist of single words only. Such utterances cannot be found in written discourse but function perfectly in any conversation (Burns & Joyce 1997: 15).

To sum up, speaking is much more than just a way of making conversation. It serves to exchange meaning and requires knowledge and skills of various types. Hence, becoming a competent speaker in a foreign language is a challenging task which requires extensive training.

4.2.1 Speaking Sub-Skills

Speaking cannot be reduced to mere production of sounds. Proficient speakers need to master monological and dialogical as well as transactional and interactional communication. Furthermore, they need to be able to produce both, spontaneous and scripted speech. Thus, speaking has to be viewed as the sum of a number of sub-skills, which will be outlined in the following section.

Monological vs. Dialogical Speaking

Speaking can be divided into monological and dialogical speech, also known as spoken production and spoken interaction.

The former, namely monological speech, is “a prolonged talk or discourse by a single speaker, especially one dominating or monopolizing a conversation” (Dictionary.com). Hence, a monolog can be defined as a one-to-many, one-way directed communication as illustrated in figure 1 (Kvernbekk 2009:1).



Figure 1: Monological speech

The one-way direction of a monolog leads to a distance between the speaker and the audience and thus listeners are not called upon to reply to the speaker’s message but given freedom of interpretation. Nevertheless, speakers taking the floor for a prolonged turn take responsibility for sequencing their utterances in a way that the listeners are able to “create a *coherent* mental representation of what he is trying to say” [original emphasis] (Brown & Yule 1983: 17).

Overall, monological speech, which in everyday life as well as school contexts is to be found in lectures, presentations and performances, is usually scripted as it involves a prior preparation of the text (Kvernbekk 2009: 9).

In contrast to monological speech, dialogical speech is “[a] discussion between two or more people or groups, especially one directed towards exploration of a particular subject or resolution of a problem” (Oxford Dictionaries Online). As figure 2 shows,

dialogical speaking involves interaction in which the participants take the role of both



Figure 2: Dialogical speech

speaker and listener.

In general, people taking part in conversation need to be sensitive to each other in order to ensure understanding. That is to say, they need to match their knowledge about the language system, conversational conventions, contextual cues and the world in general because otherwise successful communication cannot be guaranteed (Burns & Joyce 1997: 5f.).

Transactional vs. Interactional Speaking

With regard to dialogical speaking, a distinction can be made between transactional and interactional exchanges.

“Transactional uses of language are those in which language is being used primarily for communicating information” (Richards 1990: 56). Speakers in transactional situations aim at obtaining information, goods and/or services. Therefore, transactional situations normally fulfill a practical purpose and often have a predictable outcome. Examples of situations in which transactional speaking occurs include phoning a doctor to make an appointment, calling a hotel to make a reservation or going to a bank to ask for a loan (Burns & Joyce 1997: 25f.).

Interactional talk, in contrast, is usually less predictable. That is because it involves speakers in casual conversation, which includes frequent shifts in topic and tends to be open-ended. The main purpose of interactional situations is the establishment or maintenance of social contact with fellow people. Therefore, the language used in interactional situations is highly dependent on variables such as the relationship between the interlocutors, feelings, status, etc. Overall, chatting with friends, talking to neighbors or simply an informal conversation can be classified as interactional (Burns & Joyce 1997: 25f.).

Spontaneous vs. Scripted speech

Speaking, especially monological speech, can take two forms. On the one hand, it can be scripted which implies that the speakers do know what they are going to say as in such situations the text has been prepared beforehand. On the other hand, speeches can be delivered spontaneously, in real-time and without any preparation. In this case speech is less predictable but tends to results more natural (Burns & Joyce 1997: 8).

4.3 READING

Reading is a receptive skill which is no longer viewed as being a passive ability but regarded as being a communicative act. That is to say, reading is a contextualized interactive process between the author, the text and the reader. It is interactive because the reader derives meaning from the text by activating prior knowledge which is then extended with new information provided by the text. It is contextualized because a reading event is always encountered in a specific situational and cultural context that influences the reading of the text (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor 2006b: 265f.).

Reading is a complex cognitive activity, which

“is not an inherently natural process in the same way that speaking and listening are in a first language (L1). Unlike our first spoken language, which one might say ‘comes for free’, nothing is free with respect to reading. Learning to read requires considerable cognitive effort and a long learning process, whether one is learning to read in the L1 or in a second language (L2). If a person is not taught to read, in one way or another (e.g., by a teacher, a parent, a sibling), that person will not learn to read. (Grabe 2006: 279)

The reading skill is special and differs from the other skills in that it requires visual perception. That is to say, readers who want to understand a text in a foreign language need to be able to recognize the characters of that language (Valette 1967: 109).

In sum, reading is a demanding process, which according to Grabe (1991: 379) requires the mastery of the following six component skills and knowledge areas:

1. Automatic recognition skills

2. Vocabulary and structural knowledge
3. Formal discourse structure knowledge
4. Content/world background knowledge
5. Synthesis and evaluation skills/strategies
6. Metacognitive knowledge and skills monitoring

Automatic recognition skills, also called identification skills, are critical to fluent reading. In order to comprehend a text, automaticity, which “may be defined as occurring when the reader is unaware of the process, not consciously controlling the process, and using little processing capacity” (Grabe 1991: 379f.), is required. This implies that automatic lexical access, the ability to recognize text and identify words, is indispensable for successful fluent reading (Grabe 1991: 379f. and Celce-Murcia 2001: 154).

Another aspect central to reading is **vocabulary and structural knowledge**. Having a large vocabulary and knowledge of a language’s structure enables readers to work on and understand a text. Good readers are able to recognize and decode words, linguistic features and grammatical structures without much effort. That is to say, fluent readers have a sound knowledge of language structure and possess a large recognition vocabulary. Generally, it can be said that knowledge concerning the language structure is of greater importance because as a matter of fact it is always possible to look up unknown words in a dictionary. However, if readers do have problems understanding the relationship between the constituents of a sentence they will not be able to make sense of the text (Hedge 2000: 192; Grabe 1991: 380; Grabe 2006: 284 and Valette 1967: 109).

The third component influencing reading comprehension is **formal discourse structure knowledge**, which is “an understanding of how texts are organized and how information is put together into various genres (e.g., a report, a letter, a narrative)” (Celce-Murcia 2001: 154).

Fourth, readers’ **content and world background knowledge** affects the reading process. Of course, comprehension is influenced by the amount of prior knowledge readers bring to a text. Understanding is easier for readers who can relate to the text’s topic because then they are able to make inferences and disambiguate lexical as well as syntactic meanings. Apart from that, the entire meaning of a text can only be appreciated if readers understand the cultural information involved in the text

because, as a matter of fact, a text is never only a text but always part of a larger context. In order to do so, readers relate to two types of schemata, namely content and formal schemata. That is to say, in order to comprehend a text, readers on the one hand make use of “knowledge relative to the content domain of the text” and on the other hand also refer to “knowledge relative to the formal, rhetorical organizational structures of different types of texts” (Carrell 1987: 461). (Grabe 1991: 381; Grabe 2006: 285 and Ediger 2001: 154).

Synthesis and evaluation skills/strategies are two more aspects contributing to reading comprehension. Fluent readers do not read for comprehension only but normally compare the information provided by the text with a variety of other sources. Furthermore, competent readers engage in predicting possible content while reading a text as this enables them to critically “evaluate the information; take a position with respect to the author's intentions; and decide whether or not the information is useful” (Grabe 1991: 381). Apart from that, evaluation serves to decide on how persuasive, interesting, stimulating or boring a text is for the reader (Grabe 1991: 381 and Ediger 2001: 154).

Finally, fluent reading also requires a certain amount of **metacognitive knowledge and skills monitoring**.

Metacognitive knowledge can be defined as “knowledge about cognition and the self-regulation of cognition” (Grabe 1991: 382). It comprises knowledge about the language, recognition of structural and organizational patterns and the usage of proper strategies to accomplish specific goals. With regard to reading this includes

recognizing the more important information in a text; adjusting reading rate; using context to sort out a misunderstood segment; skimming portions of the text; previewing headings, pictures, and summaries; using search strategies for finding specific information; formulating questions about the information; using a dictionary; using word-formation and affix information to guess word meanings; taking notes; underlining; summarizing information; and so on. (Grabe 1991: 382)

The monitoring of cognition further encompasses the ability to recognize difficulties with information presented in a text or problems in achieving expected objectives. Strategies for self-regulation include aspects such as proactive planning, self-comprehension testing, and effectiveness checking and revision of one's strategies (Grabe 1991: 382).

Apart from the above-described perspective on reading, many researchers also understand reading as a process including bottom-up and top-down processing. Both processing models have already been described with regard to listening but will be taken another look at in this chapter, as they are also fundamental to the reading skill.

The **bottom-up** processing model in reading refers to “the decoding of the letters, words, and other language features in the text” (Hedge 2000: 189). It holds that readers first recognize letters, then words and finally sentences to which they then assign meaning by means of applying semantic and syntactic rules. Hence bottom-up reading is a one-directional model moving from the bottom to the top, from perceiving single letters to constructing meaning (Urquhart & Weir 2002: 40 and Williams 2006: 365).

As opposed to this, **top-down** processing is used to refer to approaches in which “the expectations of the reader play a crucial, even dominant, role in the processing of the text. The reader is seen as bringing hypotheses to bear on the text, and using the text data to confirm or deny the hypotheses” (Urquhart & Weir 2002: 42). It follows from this that top-down reading models do not start with the processing of the smallest text units but implies that readers decode the meaning of a text by the application of prior knowledge (Urquhart & Weir 2002: 42 and Hedge 2000: 189).

Besides the many skills and the processing involved in reading there are some variables, which should be taken into account with regard to L2 classroom which in today's society are normally not homogenous. “[S]tudents may have widely different L1 backgrounds, educational backgrounds, language proficiency levels, cultures, or prior experiences with literacy” (Ediger 2001: 156). That is to say, reading comprehension is influenced by students' literacy level in the L1 and their experience of previously acquired languages. Furthermore, the linguistic relationship between L1 and L2 as well as the cultural similarity between the two languages affects text understanding. Finally, the differences between the script of L1 and L2 must not be ignored because as a matter of fact, it is easier to read a text in a language with the same or a similar alphabet than a text that is written in an unfamiliar script (Urquhart & Weir 2002: 33f.).

To sum up, reading requires, as all other skills, a considerable amount of practice. “Familiarity with structure, a solid passive vocabulary, accurate visual perception and

speed all play their roles in reading” (Valette 1967: 110) which is without doubt a skill that develops gradually, takes considerable time and thus has to be regarded as a product of long-term effort (Grabe 1991: 379).

4.3.1 Reading Sub-Skills

People read all sorts of texts for different purposes and therefore need the ability to perform a variety of reading sub-skills. Readers and of course, also language learners need to master different reading styles and must be able to work with a variety of text types which will be outlined in the following sub-chapter.

Extensive vs. Intensive Reading

In reading a distinction can be made between extensive and intensive reading. Extensive reading, as its name suggests, is reading large amounts of text for extended periods of time and according to Grabe (2008: 10) serves the purpose of general comprehension. It is a skill that assumes a certain level of fluency, the ability to process words and sentences and an awareness of text structure. Moreover, it requires “inferencing, monitoring and evaluating skills; motivation to persist; and prior experiences of success with extended reading” (Grabe 2008: 311). In general, this type of reading is quite time-consuming and thus often only happens outside school hours. Nevertheless, it should be recognized that extensive reading is beneficial as it leads to better reading comprehension and an increase of vocabulary and further provides conditions for meaning-focused input and the development of fluency (Grabe 2008: 312f. and Nation 2009: 49-50).

Intensive reading, which stands in opposition to extensive reading, can also be referred to as slow and careful reading. In general, this type of reading is used to improve students’ comprehension skills and further serves as a means of increasing learners’ control of reading strategies. Apart from that, intensive engagement with a text allows students to study language and textual features, such as vocabulary, grammar, sound-spelling relations, cohesion and coherence or genre characteristics (Nation 2009: 25-27).

Reading for Gist vs. Skimming vs. Scanning

Just as people listen to texts for different purposes, people read texts having a variety of intentions. That is to say, readers use different techniques to obtain their desired information which means that they either read for gist or skim or scan a text. Reading for gist, also referred to as reading for general understanding, “is a process requiring visual and semantic processing and the construction of a summary version of what the text means” (Grabe 2006: 281). As such this reading style, which is often used when reading articles, e-mails or news, demands more cognitive processing than skimming or scanning. Fluent readers perform it at a rate of around 250 to 300 words per minute (Grabe 2006: 281).

Skimming is a rapid and selective reading technique “used to get a global impression of the content of a text. An example would be previewing a long magazine article by reading rapidly, skipping large chunks of information, and focusing on headings and first lines of paragraphs” (Hedge 2000: 195). This means that this reading technique “requires readers to quickly evaluate the main points of the text and to reject what is irrelevant. In skimming the reader builds up a macrostructure of the text, according to ones [sic] clearly defined reading goal” (Windhager 2014: 64).

Another rapid and selective reading technique is scanning, which is used when searching for specific information. It is the reading style used to locate particular words or phrases in a text. Furthermore, scanning serves to quickly search for figures or percentages as well as specific items in an index or to look for names in a bibliography or a set of references (Nation 2009: 70 and Hughes 2003: 138).

Overall, “[t]he main feature of scanning is that any part of the text which does not contain the preselected symbol(s) is dismissed” (Urquhart & Weir 2002: 103). Hence, scanning demands almost no semantic or syntactic processing. In scanning readers only need to check whether or not the scanned word fits into the search description. Information, which is not related to the specific information the reader is searching for, can be disregarded. Hence, it is usually not necessary to complete the reading of every sentence. Fluent readers carry out scanning at a rate of 600 words per minute which means that it can be performed twice as fast as the above described reading for understanding (Harmer 1991: 183 and Grabe 2006: 281).

In sum, reading for understanding, skimming and scanning are all reading techniques carried out at a high speed but serve different purposes.

Reading Aloud vs. Silently

Reading, as commonly known, can either happen aloud or silently.

In general, reading aloud does not have the best reputation in second language teaching. Nevertheless, some researchers and teachers believe that this type of reading improves academic achievement. Nation (2009: 66) for example notes that reading aloud fosters fluent decoding and comprehension skills. Thiele (n.d.: 86) furthermore finds that “[t]he skill of reading out-loud provides the avenue for full engagement with the written text and promotes internalisation of ideas”. Overall, it can be regarded as useful for practicing correct decoding as well as for pronunciation and intonation training.

Reading aloud serves to convey the information and message of a text to a listener, which in classroom settings is the teacher, fellow students or both. In this sense it is viewed as being conducive as it allows people to gain pleasure from listening to stories and from reading stories to others (Nation 2009: 67f.).

Besides reading aloud, people more often read in silence. Silent reading, which is the preferred method in second language acquisition, is done independently which means that readers are given freedom to process the text at their own pace. As such it is an effective method to increase reading speed and to improve one’s reading efficiency.

Reading Educational Texts vs. “Authentic” Texts

With regard to reading, one can also differentiate between the types of texts. In educational settings a distinction is commonly made between educational and genuine texts.

Educational texts are written especially for language students who

will probably not be able to handle genuinely authentic texts, but should nevertheless be given practice in reading [...] texts that look authentic (even if there has been some language control). The reading of such texts [...] will help students to acquire the necessary receptive skills they will need when they eventually come to tackle authentic material. (Harmer 1983: 146)

They are artificial and often only focus on the language they want to teach. That is to say, educational texts are in many cases written in an extremely unvaried language which is not characteristic of real life texts (Harmer 1991: 185f.).

In contrast, genuine texts, which are often referred to as authentic texts, are composed for communicative purposes only. They are written for native speakers instead of language learners and thus have not got any language teaching intention. English-language newspaper articles, radio-programs, advertisements or novels are examples of authentic texts (Harmer 1991:185).

4.4 WRITING

Writing is, just as speaking, a productive skill and can be considered as meaning anything from taking down short notes or writing letters to composing longer discourse. (Weigle 2002: 7) It is a must in our global society and an indispensable part of institutional foreign and second language acquisition. Writing is an important skill because it enables

individuals to take on social roles which are denied to those who do not have this skill. [...] When someone learns how to write, they are not just developing a new skill, they are also getting involved in an activity in which questions of social role, power, and the appropriate use of language cannot be avoided. (Tribble 1996: 14)

Generally, writing is one of the most difficult skills to obtain because it cannot be acquired simply by exposure. Writing in a foreign language is not possible without knowledge of its vocabulary or grammar and thus specific instruction as well as continuous training is needed. That is to say, a person needs certain prerequisites to produce a written text meaningful for its possible readers (Tribble 1996: 11).

In order to do so, it is necessary that language learners acquiring writing are involved in

meaning-focused use, language-focused learning, and fluency development. It is also important to make sure that the uses of writing cover the range of uses that learners will perform in their daily lives. These can include filling forms, making lists, writing friendly letters and business letters, note-taking and academic writing. (Nation 2009: 113)

Overall, five different types of knowledge are required to create effective written texts. First, **content knowledge**, which refers to knowledge concerning the ideas as well as the concepts of the subject area the text will be concerned with, is required (Hyland 2003: 27 and Tribble 1996: 67).

Second, a successful writer needs **knowledge of the language system**. That is to say, in order to complete writing tasks one needs to know the lexis as well as the

syntax of the language and should further have knowledge about formal conventions of different text types (Hyland 2003: 27 and Tribble 1996: 67).

The third type of knowledge required for effective writing is **genre knowledge**, which is an awareness of different communicative purposes of a text genre and its significance in specific contexts (Hyland 2003: 27).

Furthermore, writers need an **understanding** “of the **social context** in which the text will be read, including the reader’s expectations, and knowledge of the co-texts alongside which this new text will be read” (Tribble 1996: 67). That is to say, successful writers are sensitive to readers of their writing and therefore aim at producing reader-based texts. “In other words, they think about what the readers need to know, how to make information clear and accessible, and what is an appropriate style (for example, formal, friendly or persuasive)” (Hedge 2000: 307). This is of importance because texts are normally targeted at a specific audience that provides a specific writing context and influences the choice of both content and style. (Hyland 2003: 27; Tribble 1996: 6; Hedge 2000: 307 and Grabe & Kaplan 1996: 207-209).

Moreover, writers need to be aware of the fact that a text is never only a text but always part of a context. Although every text has its unique features, it always relates to other texts. It cannot be understood only in terms of itself but has to be situated in its discourse community (Silva & Matsuda 2002: 254). Thus, writers need to develop cross-cultural awareness, a “knowledge of how to produce written texts within a particular sociocultural context [i]n order to produce a competently written discourse within a particular culture” (Usó-Juan; Martínez-Flor & Palmer-Silveira 2006: 393).

Fifth and finally, effective writing can only take place with knowledge of successful ways of preparing and carrying out writing tasks, which is referred to as **process knowledge**. That is to say, any developmental composition process requires a variety of strategies including “considering the goals of the writer, having a model of the reader, gathering ideas, organizing ideas, turning ideas into written text, reviewing what has been written [and] editing” (Hedge 2000: 302). In general, this writing process is not linear but recursive and generative. According to Flower and Hayes’ cognitive process model (1981) it consists of three main stages: planning, translating and reviewing, which will be described below (Hyland 2003: 27; Tribble

1996: 68; Grabe & Kaplan 1996: 91; Hedge 2000: 303 and Flower & Hayes 1981: 366-369).

The first stage in extended writing is **planning**, which comprises three components, namely generating ideas, organizing information and goal-setting. Furthermore, it involves thinking about the purpose and the readership of the text (Flower & Hayes 1981: 366-369; Grabe & Kaplan 1996: 91 and Hedge 2000: 305).

In general, the planning phase can take different forms. It may start with '5W1H' questions: who, what, when, where, why and how; or with questions about act, scene, agent, agency and purpose. Moreover, brainstorming or noting down ideas are common techniques used to explore and generate ideas about the respective topic (Silva & Matsuda 2002: 255).

The "amount of planning will vary [...] in relation to the type of writing task, from relatively spontaneous writing based on a quick mental plan, to something carefully worked out beforehand in notes" (Hedge 2000: 305). Apart from that it will also be affected by the writer's preferred style. Overall, it is important that writers invest sufficient time in planning because pre-writing strategies influence the drafting phase and in the end affect the quality of the final written product (Grabe & Kaplan 1996: 232).

After the completion of the initial planning phase, writers start to produce their texts either on paper or on computer screens. That is to say, they begin to formulate and draft their written products. In Flower and Hayes' model (1981) this writing process stage is called **translating** because the writer's task in this phase is to translate the thoughts generated in the planning phase and organize them into a linear piece of written text. Overall, "[t]he process of translating requires the writer to juggle all the special demands of written English [...] lying on a spectrum from generic and formal demands through syntactic and lexical ones down to the motor tasks of forming letters" (Flower & Hayes 1981: 373).

The final stage in the writing process is the **reviewing** phase. It is an important part of the composition process because as part of this phase writers evaluate, revise and edit their texts. This is because writers do not only write but also reflect upon their texts and thereby decide on additions, deletions, rearrangements and grammatical as well as stylistic corrections to improve their texts. In educational settings it is further common to react to comments and improvement suggestions from peers and

teachers. Apart from that, laying aside the text for a while can be helpful when revising a text because this enables the writer to view the text from a new perspective. Overall, reviewing can either be conscious or unplanned but in both cases occur at any time in the act of writing (Flower & Hayes 1981: 371; Hedge 2000: 302f., 306; Tribble 1996: 115 and Silva & Matsuda 2002: 256).

Overall, most writers are engaged in several revisions throughout the entire composition process. The amount as well as the type of revision does vary according to the writer's skills and further depends on the writing task, the subject, the purpose, the genre, the level of formality and the degree of familiarity with the audience (Hedge 2000: 306). In general, revisions are often invisible as they only take place in writer's heads. Experienced writers may in fact be able to rehearse in their minds to such an extent that their first drafts do only require few revisions (Silva & Matsuda 2002: 256).

With regard to institutional settings, a further distinction has to be drawn between in-class (timed) and out-of-class (untimed) writing. The first, forms part of the language class and often happens under tremendous time pressure putting stress on the language learners. The latter, in contrast, allows learners to practice the different phases, from collecting and analyzing information to generating ideas and drafting as well as editing texts, as it takes place outside the classroom and allows for longer processing (Weigle 2002: 173f.).

In sum, the mastery of writing in a second or foreign language is a major achievement because "[w]hile every act of writing is in a sense both personal and individual, it is also interactional and social, expressing a culturally recognized purpose, reflecting a particular kind of relationship, and acknowledging an engagement in a given community" (Hyland 2003: 27). Writing is much more than a set of cognitive or technical capabilities or a mere system of rules. Hence, becoming a competent writer in a second language comprises many complex aspects and can definitely not be limited to training in composing and revising only (Hyland 2003: 27).

4.4.1 Writing Sub-Skills

Writing can take different forms, ranging from taking down single words to composing coherent texts of various genres. Hence, it is a productive skill which can be rather mechanical but also cognitively demanding. In the following the different dimensions and skills involved in writing will be described.

Writing single words or sentences vs. Writing a text

Writing can take many forms, ranging from single words, over short paragraphs to long texts. Writing single words or short sentences only requires few linguistic and cognitive skills. Hence, it is less challenging than composing a longer text which

involves the combining of structural sentence units into a more-or-less unique, cohesive and coherent larger structure (as opposed to lists, forms, etc.). A piece of writing which implicates composing contains surface features which connect the discourse and an underlying logic of organization which is more than simply the sum of the meanings of the individual sentences. (Grabe & Kaplan 1996: 4)

In order to successfully compose a text a writer needs to have command over the language, its vocabulary and rhetorical features (Grabe & Kaplan 1996: 251). Moreover, knowledge concerning text types, intended audience and the purpose is necessary. In addition to this complexity, composing a text is more time-consuming than writing single words or sentences. A text needs to be planned, drafted, revised and edited, which may easily take several hours whereas taking down single words or sentences can be done within a few minutes or even seconds.

Copying from the board

Copying from the board does not only involve writing but also reading. Students need to be able to decipher the words on the board so that they can then take them down correctly. Overall, students do not compose anything themselves when copying from the board and thus only little cognition and linguistic skill is required. (Windhager 2014: 71f.)

Note Taking

Note-taking is a technique which requires a person to do listening and writing at the same time. People normally do not speak at dictation speed and thus it is impossible to take down every single word in note-taking situations. Instead, it is necessary to pick up the most important information in order to write a summary of the source text. That is to say, effective note taking requires students to recognize main ideas and to identify relevant information. Furthermore, they need to be able to reduce information into note form so that it can be understood at any time later (Raimes 1983: 78 and Jones & Mort 2010).

Overall, note-taking is a meaning-focused activity which “does two jobs: it stores information for later use, and it provides the opportunity to encode information” (Newton 2009: 52). That is to say, on the one hand note taking is a means for learners to record material and on the other hand it serves to change the form of the information from one to another, for instance from spoken to written (Newton 2009: 52).

Filling in a Worksheet

In English as a foreign language classrooms, handouts and worksheets are frequently used and therefore students are often asked to fill them in. That is to say, they often have to complete exercises such as filling in the gaps, completing texts, answering questions or labeling a map. These tasks in which students examine reading passages with parts (words, phrases, sentences, or larger chunks) missing, require them to consider meaning as well as a great many features of writing (Raimes 1983: 60).

Dictation

Dictation has been part of language classrooms for hundreds of years but it is a teaching technique which has somewhat gone out of fashion over time. In its basic form, dictation refers to a person reading out loud a passage to some listeners who take down what is being said. That is to say, dictation is a tool mainly used to work on accuracy which requires a person to simultaneously listen and write (British Council 2005).

With regard to classroom settings, dictation implies that students write down what is being said by their teacher, word by word. Later the dictates are checked either by the teacher or the students themselves so that errors can be identified and corrected (British Council 2005).

In general, dictation can be done with any language level class and usually requires little preparation time. Furthermore, it can be used to train accuracy and meaning, and to develop students' listening and writing skills. Nevertheless, it should be admitted that dictation used in the same form over and over again is likely to lead to boredom or even aversion (British Council 2005)

5 THE FOUR LANGUAGE SKILLS IN THE AUSTRIAN CURRICULUM

After having looked at the four language skills within different teaching methods and approaches as well as the historical development, it is useful to take a look at the Austrian foreign languages curricula and investigate how listening, speaking, reading and writing is represented within these descriptive as well as prescriptive language teaching and learning documents.

The current curricula for foreign language teaching in Austria have been published in 2004 by the “Bundesministerium für Bildung und Frauen”. They are based on the “Common European Framework of References” (CEFR) and include educational and teaching tasks, basic teaching principles and the teaching syllabus.

With regard to teaching methods and approaches, the Austrian curriculum for foreign languages “Lebende Fremdsprache (Erste, Zweite)” for upper secondary classes (level A1-B2) in “Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schulen” (AHS) includes the following statements that clearly reflect communicative language teaching principles.

Ziel des Fremdsprachenunterrichts der Oberstufe ist es, die Schülerinnen und Schüler zu befähigen, in der jeweiligen Fremdsprache grundlegende kommunikative Anforderungen des gesellschaftlichen Lebens zu erfüllen und sich in den Fertigungsbereichen Hören, Lesen, Sprechen, Schreiben in einer breiten Palette von privaten, beruflichen und öffentlichen Situationen sprachlich und kulturell angemessen zu verhalten [The goal of language teaching in the upper secondary level is to enable the students to meet the communicative requirements of everyday life in the respective target language and to behave linguistically and culturally adequate in the skill areas listening, reading, speaking and writing as well as in a wide range of personal, professional and social situations.]. (BMBF 2004a: 1)

Dem handlungsorientierten Ansatz gemäß stellt die kommunikative Sprachkompetenz das übergeordnete Lehr- und Lernziel des Fremdsprachenunterrichts dar. Das heißt, fremdsprachliche Teilkompetenzen sind in dem Maße zu vermitteln, wie sie für erfolgreiche mündliche und schriftliche Kommunikation nötig sind [In accordance with the action-oriented approach, communicative competence is the primary objective of foreign language teaching. This implies that foreign language sub-skills have to be imparted to the extent necessary for successful oral and written communication.]. (BMBF 2004a: 2)

Besides these statements stressing the importance of developing communicative competence, the AHS curriculum calls for a balanced training of the four language skills in the foreign language classroom by stating:

Die Fertigkeitsbereiche Hören, Lesen, an Gesprächen teilnehmen, zusammenhängendes Sprechen, Schreiben sind mit gleicher Gewichtung, regelmäßig und möglichst integrativ zu üben. Auf Praxisrelevanz sowie steigende Authentizität der Sprachmittel und Sprachsituationen ist dabei besonders zu achten [The skill areas of listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing have to be practiced with identical weighting, regularly and as inclusive as possible. Here attention has to be paid to practical relevance as well as authenticity of language tools and language situations.]. (BMBF 2004a: 2)

The curriculum for “Berufsbildende Höhere Schulen” (BHS) also mentions the importance of the four language skills for communication, as it includes the following statement:

Die Schülerinnen und Schüler sollen die Fertigkeiten des Hörverstehens, Sprechens, Lesens und Schreibens im Kommunikationsprozess in der lebenden Fremdsprache situationsgerecht einsetzen [...] können. [The students should be able to adequately employ listening speaking, reading and writing skills in any process of communication]. (BMBF 2004b: 14)

Overall, it appears that both, the AHS as well as the BHS curriculum show an awareness of the importance of the four language skills and include statements which declare that listening, speaking, reading and writing need to be trained in the foreign language classroom.

This gives rise to the following research questions, which will consequently be discussed in the empirical part of this thesis:

- Does each of the four language skills occur in Austrian EFL classrooms?
- How much time is allocated to each language skill in Austrian EFL lessons?
- How are the language sub skills distributed?

6 EMPIRICAL STUDY

While the four language skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing have been explored from a theoretical angle in the first part of this thesis, an empirical perspective based on classroom observation and teacher interviews of the four skills in English as a foreign language classrooms will be presented in the following chapters.

In order to answer the research questions presented in the previous chapter, 23 lessons in nine upper secondary Austrian EFL classrooms were observed. Based on the results of the investigated English lessons it should be determined whether or not each of the four language skills receives equal attention, as theory suggests. If they should not, it should be analyzed which of the skills is underrepresented and should receive more attention.

The interviews with three of the observed teachers should provide further insights into the teaching of speaking, listening, reading and writing. That is to say, the interviews serve to reveal teacher's experiences and thoughts on the challenges and difficulties of integrating the four language skills into the syllabus.

That is to say, the next chapter presents the method, the material, and the subjects of both, the quantitative classroom observations and the qualitative teacher interviews. First, classroom observation and its theoretical foundations will be explored. As part of this, the observational schedule and its coding system will be presented. Furthermore, a brief description of the observation process as well as the schools under observation for this research will be provided. After that, the research interview, this thesis' second method to gather data, will be looked at in greater detail. With respect to this, first, theory on teacher interviews will be provided. Then, aspects concerning the usage of interview guides and the questions asked during the interviews will be presented. Finally, the process as well as the context of the conducted interviews will be described.

After that, the final part of this thesis will be dedicated to the evaluation of the observation as well as the interview results, which will be interpreted and connected to the theoretical considerations of the four language skills presented in the initial chapters.

6.1 Classroom Observation

Classroom observation is a common method used for empirical research as it allows the researcher to collect data in live situations. That is to say, the researcher does not have to rely on data from second hand but is given the chance to observe in situ. The researcher is thereby enabled to understand the context of the situations, to see or discover things that might otherwise be overlooked or that participants might not talk about in interviews, to move beyond data based on perception and to access personal knowledge (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2001: 305).

The classroom observation conducted for this thesis is highly structured and as such to be regarded as a quantitative inquiry. The research focus as well as specific observation categories have been defined in advance. That is to say, an observation scheme with discrete and mutually exclusive categories has been designed prior to observation in order to effectively document data (Dörnyei 2007: 179-180 and Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2001: 306). The scheme used for this thesis' classroom observation focusing on the occurrence and distribution of the four language skills will be described in further detail in the next chapter.

Generally, it is obvious that the preparation of a structured observation takes some time but once the categories have been defined, data can be gathered rapidly (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2001: 306). Observation schemes add systematicity to the research process and make the documentation of classroom realities doable. Furthermore, structured observation can be regarded as being of high reliability as it allows the collection of comparable data across classrooms as well as over time (Dörnyei 2007: 185). In other words, the researcher is able to "generate numerical data from the observations [which] in turn, facilitate the making of comparisons between settings and situations, and frequencies, patterns and trends to be noted or calculated" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2001: 306). It follows, that data analysis is rather uncomplicated, as one only has to summarize the number of tokens in order to arrive at comparable results. With regard to this thesis, this method allows the quantitative comparison of the occurrence and distribution of listening, speaking reading and writing in different Austrian EFL classrooms.

The way of entering data into the observation schedule was that of interval recording. Here the researcher enters what s/he observes "at fixed intervals [and thereby] charts what has happened during the preceding interval" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison

2001: 309). That is to say, interval recording is a documentation of events occurring in specific time intervals which allows a calculation of frequencies as well as an observation of patterns” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2001: 309) and provides information about “the distribution of the particular phenomenon throughout the class” (Dörnyei 2007: 180).

With regard to the observation categories, low-interference ones have been chosen, as these are “so straightforward that even in real-time coding (i.e. ongoing coding during observation) the observer can reach almost perfect reliability in recording instances of [them]” (Dörnyei 2007: 180).

Nevertheless, classroom observation, as any other data collection approach, carries certain problems, which one should be aware of.

First and foremost, it is the researcher who represents a problem, which is called the ‘observer’s paradox’. This paradox implies that “by observing people’s behaviour we often alter the very behavioural patterns we wish to observe” (Bailey 2001: 116). In order to avoid the occurrence of this paradox it is recommendable to explain the purpose of the inquiry to the teachers and students under observation. This step should be done as it will take pressure off them and will lead to a more natural behavior. That is to say, it will be less likely that the teachers and students act out or behave better than normal (Bailey 2001: 116).

Another problem that might have an undesirable impact on the research outcome is that any structured observation entails a reduction of the complexity of the observed situation. This means that “by focusing on the target categories the observer can miss some more important features” (Dörnyei 2007: 186).

Furthermore, it has to be recognized that the “recording of a phenomenon does not necessarily lead to understanding the reasons why it has happened, particularly when low-interference categories are used” (Dörnyei 2007: 185).

With these problems in mind, high diligence was put into the designing of the observational schedule, which of course was piloted in advance. The piloting in form of one classroom observation prior to the actual research observations was necessary, as any researcher needs practice in completing his or her observational schedule in order to become proficient in entering data accurately, consistently and fast (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007: 399).

6.1.1 Observational Schedule

The observational schedule, which is provided below, consists of 39 categories referring to the listening, speaking, reading and writing sub-skills which have been described in detail in chapter 4. The categories are discrete which means that they do not overlap so that accurate data ascertainment is possible (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2001: 306).

The categories belonging to the listening skill that differentiate between real-life listening and listening to recorded material are *listening to the teacher*, *listening to other students*, *listening to a native*, *listening to an audio-file* and *listening to a video*. With regard to the different types of listening students are confronted with, the observational schedule includes listening for *content* and listening for *detail*.

Speaking is separated into monological and dialogical speech. Monological speech, which is also named spoken production and can be defined as a prolonged turn of speech consisting of several utterances, is divided into four categories (Brown & Yule 1983: 16). The first category *giving presentations* is a non-interactive activity, in which students speak about a prepared topic, often with the support of notes or visuals. The second monological category is *presenting results*, which is not very cognitively or linguistically demanding as it is in fact often limited to reading out loud results of previous activities (Windhager 2014: 71). The third and fourth category relating to monological speech provide information about whether 'giving presentations' or 'presenting results' is done *spontaneously* or *scripted*.

Dialogical speech, also referred to as interactional speech, is subdivided into seven categories. The first three categories are named *pair work*, *group work* and *plenary work*. These three dialogical situations are all characterized by interaction and cooperation of two or more students. That is to say, they involve turn taking and turn giving and require the participants to take the role of both the speaker and the listener (Council of Europe 2002: 73). Apart from these categories, there is a distinction between students *answering teacher questions* and students *asking questions*. These two categories are different in the way that in the first the conversational control stays with the teacher while in the latter the students take on an active role without being asked to do so (Windhager 2014: 71). The final two categories concerned with dialogical speech differentiate between *transactional activities*, in which language is used to communicate information, and *interactional*

activities, which involve speakers in casual conversation (Richards 1990: 56 & Burns & Joyce 1997: 25f.).

With regard to the reading skill the observational schedule includes ten categories. The first seven categories are concerned with the different types and modes of reading and are called *extensive* reading, *intensive* reading, reading *for gist*, *skimming*, *scanning*, reading *silently*, reading *aloud*. Apart from that there are three categories which differentiate between the texts students have to read. These categories are reading a *book*, an *educational text* or a text on a *handout*, which differ in so far as they are either written for native speakers or especially composed for language learners.

The last skill, writing, is subdivided into five categories, which investigate what the students have to write in their English lessons. *Copying from the board*, which is the first category, involves not only writing but also reading and thus requires students to have orthographic skills (Council of Europe 2002: 117f.). The second category, *note taking*, is cognitively quite demanding as it involves writing and listening. Nevertheless, it is a useful technique because it provides the opportunity to encode information and store it for later use (Newton 2009: 52). The next category is *filling in a worksheet*, where students are often asked to complete a text by ‘filling in the gaps’, to finish sentences, or to label a map. Finally, the observation schedule distinguishes between writing *single words*, *sentences* or entire *texts*, which differ considerably in their cognitive and linguistic demands on the learners.

Besides these language-skill-categories the schedule includes 50 columns. The choice of this number of columns results from the fact that the study is targeted at Austrian schools with lessons lasting for 50 minutes. Hence, each column represents a one minute teaching time interval and “the movement from left to right represents the chronology of sequence” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2001: 306). (Windhager 2014: 70)

6.1.1.1 Coding system

Apart from the code, a method for recording the observed data has to be fixed. In the case of this study it was decided to do interval recording, which “charts the chronology of events to some extent and [...] requires the data to be entered in the appropriate category at fixed intervals” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2001: 309). This

method “enables frequencies to be calculated, simple patterns to be observed and an approximate sequence of events to be noted, because it charts what has taken place in the preceding interval of time” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2001: 309).

For any observation a coding system must be defined. That is to say, it needs to be decided what kind of entry the researcher needs to make in the appropriate category. For this field study a tick has been chosen, as the code should be easily understandable as well as simple and quick to enter (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2001: 307).

However, whenever none of the four language skills can be observed, the entire column is crossed out. “Handing out worksheets, arranging a certain seating order, or fix posters on the wall takes some time in which none of the four skills can be observed and thus nothing is entered into any category” (Windhager 2014: 74).

THE FOUR LANGUAGE SKILLS

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
LISTENING																																																		
teacher																																																		
student(s)																																																		
native																																																		
audio-file																																																		
video																																																		
content																																																		
detail																																																		
SPEAKING																																																		
MONOLOGICAL																																																		
presentation																																																		
present results																																																		
spontaneous																																																		
scripted																																																		
DIALOGICAL																																																		
pair work																																																		
group work																																																		
plenum																																																		
answer questions																																																		
ask questions																																																		
transactional																																																		
interactional																																																		
READING																																																		
intensive																																																		
extensive																																																		
for gist																																																		
skimming															</																																			

Table 1: Observational schedule

6.1.2 Observation Process

After compiling the observation schedule, the grid was piloted by means of one sample classroom observation. As this trial did not cause any changes, it was time to collect data. Therefore, several teachers were contacted so that after some initial difficulties 23 English lessons taught by five teachers in three different Viennese schools could be observed.

The observations were nonparticipant, which means that the researcher had only been minimally involved in the teaching and learning settings. This distance between the researcher and the classroom processes consequently facilitated an objective data collection (Dörnyei 2007: 179). In sum, the observations were done in a passive and non-intrusive way, with the researcher simply recording the incidences of the factors being in focus (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2001: 306).

Overall, classroom observation is not an easy task and thus some minor difficulties common for this type of research had to be faced. First, school is normally a busy environment and working with teachers can be taxing. “[T]eachers can be very busy and stressed out, and they have their own distinctive beliefs and styles as well as professional and personal agendas” (Dörnyei 2007: 188) which can lead to problems throughout the research phase. Fortunately, the teachers observed for this thesis were cooperative and supportive which made the time spent at the schools quite enjoyable.

Apart from the persons involved in the research process, unexpected events and interruptions can cause difficulties. “Almost every classroom researcher has a story about arriving at the school on ‘D-day’ [...] to find out that the students are away on a class trip or skiing holiday which nobody has remembered to tell them about” (Dörnyei 2007: 189) which can be quite nerve-racking.

Finally, classroom research is time-consuming in nature. “Research carried out in classrooms takes up a lot of time, not just because of the data collection procedures [...] but because of the necessity of meeting school administrators, teachers, students” (Dörnyei 2007: 188). Moreover, the researcher’s job is not completed after the observations have been finished because the data has to be documented and the results have to be analyzed and should also be reported back to the participants (Dörnyei 2007: 188).

6.1.3 Observation Context

The classroom observation concerned with the four language skills was conducted in three Viennese schools. These schools with different focuses were selected according to their availability. Observation was conducted in 9 different upper secondary classes with five different teachers, both native and non-native speakers of English.

In the following, a brief description of the schools as well as the observational context will be provided. For the reason of anonymity the names of the teachers, students and schools will not be published. Therefore, the institutions will be referred to as School A, School B and School C.

School A is a “Berufsbildende höhere Schule” situated in the 22nd district of Vienna with a focus on economics and tourism. In this school a total of 9 lessons has been observed. These lessons were conducted by two teachers (TA1 and TA2), one of them native, and took place in three classes with different levels. TA1 is an English and French teacher with about 16 years of experience. TA 2 is a native speaker who started teaching English, History and Citizenship to Austrian students 9 years ago.

School B is a “Bundesbildungsanstalt für Kindergartenpädagogik (Bakip)” situated in the 8th district of Vienna. It offers a 5 year education for students who are planning to become kindergarten teachers. A total of 5 lessons were observed in this school. These lessons in two different classes were conducted by one and the same teacher (TB1). TB1 is a female English and History teacher with five years of teaching experience.

School C is a “Allgemeinbildende höhere Schule” in the 13th district, offering three different branches, one focusing on languages, one on natural sciences and another one focusing on economics. It is a school combining upper and lower secondary in which students can take their Matura after 8 years of schooling. In this AHS 9 lessons held by 2 female teachers (TC1 and TC2) in four different classes have been observed. TC1 teaches English and French. TC2 is an English and Italian teacher with about 14 years of experience in teaching practice.

The following table provides an overview of all 23 English lessons observed. It indicates the school in which the lesson took place, the teacher who taught each lesson, the grade of the students and the date on which the lesson took place.

LESSON	SCHOOL	TEACHER	GRADE	DATE
1	A	TA1	3	09.12.2014
2	A	TA1	2	10.12.2014
3	A	TA1	2	11.12.2014
4	B	TB1	2	11.12.2014
5	B	TB1	2	11.12.2014
6	C	TC1	3	17.12.2014
7	C	TC1	3	18.12.2014
8	C	TC1	4	16.12.2014
9	C	TC1	4	18.12.2014
10	C	TC1	4	19.12.2014
11	A	TA2	2	20.01.2015
12	A	TA2	2	21.01.2015
13	A	TA2	2	21.01.2015
14	A	TA1	1	20.01.2015
15	A	TA1	1	20.01.2015
16	A	TA1	1	21.01.2015
17	C	TC2	4	20.01.2015
18	C	TC2	4	23.01.2015
19	B	TB1	3	11.02.2015
20	B	TB1	3	11.02.2015
21	B	TB1	2	12.02.2015
22	C	TC2	3	11.02.2015
23	C	TC2	3	11.02.2015

Table 2: Research context of the 23 observed lessons

6.2 Teacher Interviews

The second research method used for this diploma thesis is research interviews, which can be defined as “a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research relevant information and focused by him [sic] on content specified by research objectives or systematic description, prediction, or explanation” (Cannell & Kahn 1968: 527).

Interviews are characterized by a transaction of information and further “enable participants – be they interviewers or interviewees – to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view” (Cohen, Lawrence & Morrison 2001: 349).

Based on these fundamentals, most data for qualitative inquiry is gathered by means of conducting interviews of different types (Dörnyei 2007: 134). The type used for this diploma thesis is the semi-structure interview, which in general is quite frequent as it

is suitable for cases when the researcher has a good enough overview of the phenomenon or domain in question and is able to develop broad questions about the topic in advance but does not want to use ready-made response categories that would limit the depth and breadth of the respondent’s story. (Dörnyei 2007: 136)

It follows that the semi-structured interview, which can be regarded as a perfect mix between the highly structured and the unstructured interview type, is open-ended but includes a set of pre-prepared questions and prompts. “[T]he interviewer provides guidance and direction (hence the ‘-structured’ part in the name), but is also keen to follow up interesting developments and to let the interviewee elaborate on certain issues (hence the ‘semi-’ part)” (Dörnyei 2007: 136). Consequently, it is necessary to compile and pilot an interview guide, including questions which will be asked in every interview, in advance in order to ensure that this works (Dörnyei 2007: 136). The interview guide for this thesis which is concerned with the four language skills in Austrian classrooms will be described in further detail in the next chapter.

Just as any other research method, interviews carry some problems which should be considered in advance.

The main weakness of the interview is that it is time-consuming to set up and conduct, and that it requires good communication skills on the part of the interviewer, which not all of us have naturally. Because the interview format does not allow for anonymity, there is a chance that the respondent will try to display him/herself in a better than real light. Interviewees can also be too shy and inarticulate to produce sufficient data, or at the other extreme, they

can be too verbose, generating a lot of less-than-useful data. (Dörnyei 2007: 143-144)

Another weakness is the interviewer effect, which according to Denscombe (2007) describes the effect of people responding differently depending on their perception of the interviewer. "In particular, the *sex*, the *age*, and the *ethnic* origins of the interviewer have a bearing on the amount of information people are willing to divulge and their honesty about what they reveal" (Denscombe 2007: 184 quoted in Newton 2010: 5). Apart from that, interviewee's responses may be affected by what they think the situation requests. Therefore, it is important to convey the purpose and topics of the interview to the interviewee (Newton 2010: 5).

Moreover, in interviews there is always the risk of interviewees not telling the truth. There is the danger that they respond with or with opposite answers they think the interviewer wants to hear. In this case it is the interviewer's task to check doubts with probes and further questions and in the end decide whether or not the interviewee's answers are credible and reliable (Newton 2010: 5).

With regard to semi-structured interviews it should further be noted that the "[i]nterviewer flexibility in sequencing and wording questions can result in substantially different responses" (Cohen, Lawrence & Morrison 2001: 271) and as such lead to problems in the comparability of the results.

6.2.1 Interview Guide

The interview guide is the main research instrument in semi-structured interviews as it provides support for the interviewer in different areas. It helps the interviewer to ensure that nothing important is left out by accident and that the domain is covered properly. Apart from that it does not only include a template for the opening statement and a list of comments to take into account but also suggests appropriate question wordings and provides various probe questions. (Dörnyei 2007: 136-137).

Overall, an interview guide includes a variety of questions which all affect the interview in their own ways. The opening questions, which are the first few questions in an interview, are of great importance

because they set the tone and create initial rapport. If the interviewees feel that they can do themselves justice when answering the initial questions, this will make them feel competent, help them to relax and consequently encourage them to open up. (Dörnyei 2007: 137)

Opening questions are often not concerned with content but refer to personal or factual aspects, which can easily be answered as they serve as icebreakers and as such help to create a comfortable atmosphere. (Dörnyei 2007: 137) After this introductory phase, content questions are to follow. According to Dörnyei (2007: 137-138) these questions which are concerned with the research topic, can be approached by six different types of questions focusing on the following aspects:

1. experiences and behaviors
2. opinions and values
3. feelings
4. knowledge
5. sensory information
6. background or demographic information

Overall, these different question types are related to a variety of aspects of the interviewees' opinions or experiences and are therefore useful to get a general impression of the participants' individual view of the research topic.

Apart from that, content question probes are of importance as they help to enhance the research data. "[P]robes use [...] what the interviewee has said as a starting point to go further and to increase the richness and depth of the responses" (Dörnyei 2007: 138) and therefore serve to clarify questions and to go into greater detail.

Finally, an interview guide should include closing questions as these allow the interviewee to end the interview and further make it possible to ask questions such as: "Is there anything else you would like to add?" or "What should I have asked you that I didn't think to ask?" (Dörnyei 2007: 138).

The interview guide used for this thesis consists of 12 questions which all relate to different aspects of the four language skills.

Prior to the questions concerned with the four language skills all interview partners briefly presented themselves and thereby provided information about their teaching experience (teaching duration, schools) and their second subjects.

After this opening phase, the following questions concerning the teaching of the four skills were tackled.

- How much weight would you like to assign to each of the four skills in your lessons?

- Do you aim at equal weighting or is there a skill you pay more attention to? How do you succeed in putting this in practice?
- Which of the four skills is, in your opinion, the most difficult to integrate into your lessons and which one is the easiest? Why?
- Which of the four language skills is the most challenging for you as a teacher?
- Which of the four skills is the one your students mostly have to train by means of self-study outside of class time (homework)? / Which of the skills do you rather assign as homework than train with your students in class?

After that, questions about course materials were raised. These were included as course materials also have an influence on the teaching of the four skills and might be a reason for one or another skill to be over- or underrepresented. The questions concerned with this aspect, were the following:

- Which role do course materials play in teaching the four language skills in a balanced way? How do you see the development of these teaching materials?
- How are available course materials compatible with the Austrian curriculum?
- Which language sub-skills are not sufficiently covered by the available course books and teaching materials and should receive more attention?

Then, the teachers were asked to elaborate on one question concerning their students.

- Which of the four skills do you think is the most challenging for your students and why?

Finally, the following questions about the past, the present and the future of the four language skills have been raised.

- Have you experienced a change of importance of the four language skills throughout your time as a teacher? If yes, which?
- How do you see the future? Do you believe that there is a skill that will gain or lose importance in the future?

In the end, all interview partners received the chance to make further comments before the interviews were then closed with a word of thanks.

6.2.2 Interview Process

After having designed and piloted the interview-guide by means of conducting a sample interview with a student studying “Lehramt” at the University of Vienna, the next step was to conduct a number of interviews in order to collect data. Therefore, three of the observed teachers, randomly selected, were asked if they would be willing to serve as interview partners and fortunately all agreed.

The interviews were, with the permission of the teachers, recorded because as Dörnyei (2007: 139) finds “taking notes is simply not enough as we are unlikely to be able to catch all the details of the nuances of personal meaning; furthermore, note-taking also disrupts the interviewing process”.

Before starting with the questions and the recording, the reason of the interview was explained because “understanding the purpose of the questions will increase the motivation of the interviewee to respond openly and in detail” (Dörnyei 2007: 140). Moreover, the interviewees were informed about what will happen with the data and were reassured that the data will be treated with confidentiality.

After that, each interview was started with easy small-talk-like questions in order to create a relaxed atmosphere and establish one’s credentials. During the interview the interviewees were given time and space to elaborate on their views on the asked questions so that a good interview climate could be maintained. Finally, pre-closing moves were used to signal that the interview is nearing the end and the interviewees were given the chance to provide additional comments or concluding words (Dörnyei 2007: 140-143).

Overall, it was tried to create a neutral interview space to encourage the interview partners to also share the socially less-than-desirable (Dörnyei 2007: 141).

This was intended by

wording the question in a way that it suggests that the behavior is rather common (for example, ‘Even the most conscientious teachers sometimes ...’); using authority to make the sensitive issue/behaviour appear to be justifiable (for example, ‘Many researchers now think that ...’); including reasons that explain the behaviour (For example, ‘Does your busy schedule sometimes prevent you from ...?’); or simply adopting a casual approach (for example, ‘Did you happen to ...?’). (Dörnyei 2007: 141)

6.2.3 Interview Context

The qualitative interviews for this thesis were conducted with three teachers, all of them also participating in the classroom observations. The interviews, which all lasted for about 30 minutes, were done with the help of a question-guide. They took place at the teachers' schools.

In the following paragraphs a brief description of the context of the three interviews will be outlined. For the reason of anonymity the names of the interview partners will not be published. Hence the interviews will be referred to as Interview 1, 2 and 3.

Interview 1 took place in the morning in the teacher's "free lesson". During that time of the day school is normally a busy place and so was this. The teachers as well as the students rushed from one class to the next and also the interview partner was busy so that the interview started with a delay of 20 minutes and not at 9:00 am as agreed upon before. When the teacher finally had time for the interview, it was not easy to find a quiet place. First, it was intended to do the interview in the teachers' recreation room but as this was quite crowded, the interview partner suggested to move to the library, where the interview was then started. The first minutes could be conducted without problems. After about five minutes, however, another teacher started to make photocopies next to us, which led to some disturbance. Consequently, we moved once again so that in the end the interview could be completed without any further interruptions in the computer room.

Interview 2 was conducted in the afternoon directly after school. At the school the interview partner was having lunch with some colleagues. Therefore, it was not possible to start with the interview directly but only after they had finished eating. The interview then took place in a small but comfortable and quiet meeting room. Except for an interruption by another teacher who wanted to work in that room, there were no problems so that the interview could be conducted with ease.

Interview 3 was also conducted in the teacher's school. It was done in the morning, after all the interview partner's lessons. The interview was conducted in a quiet meeting room and could be started on time and finished without any interruptions.

7 Results

In the following chapter the results of both the classroom observation and the teacher interviews will be presented.

7.1 Presentation of Classroom Research Results

As part of the research a total of 23 English lessons was observed, so that in the end 1063 minutes could be evaluated. This amount of time results from the fact that in almost all lessons it was not possible to observe the entire 50 minutes, as the teachers started their lessons with a delay or ended them prior to the ringing of the bell.

The lessons took place in 9 different upper secondary classes in three different Viennese schools, all offering a different focus in education. The teachers who conducted the observed English lesson were all but one, non-native speakers.

Of course, the 23 lessons observed differ in many aspects such as language level or focus and topic of the lesson. Nevertheless, they also have common features so that an objective evaluation is assured.

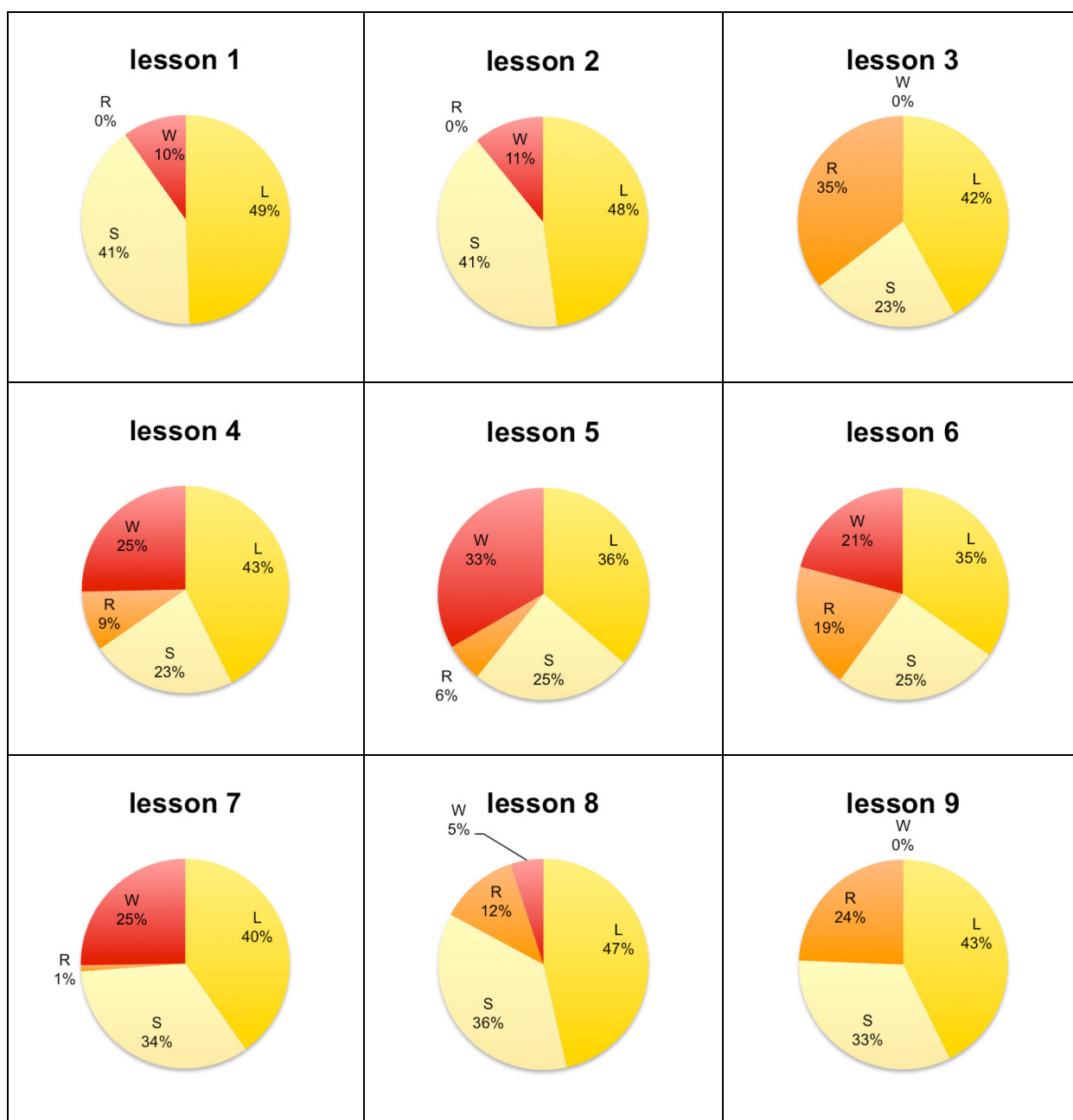
The following table shows the results of all observed EFL lessons. It provides the number of tokens per category for each lesson and as such serves as the basis for this thesis' statistical analysis of the four language skills, which follows thereafter.

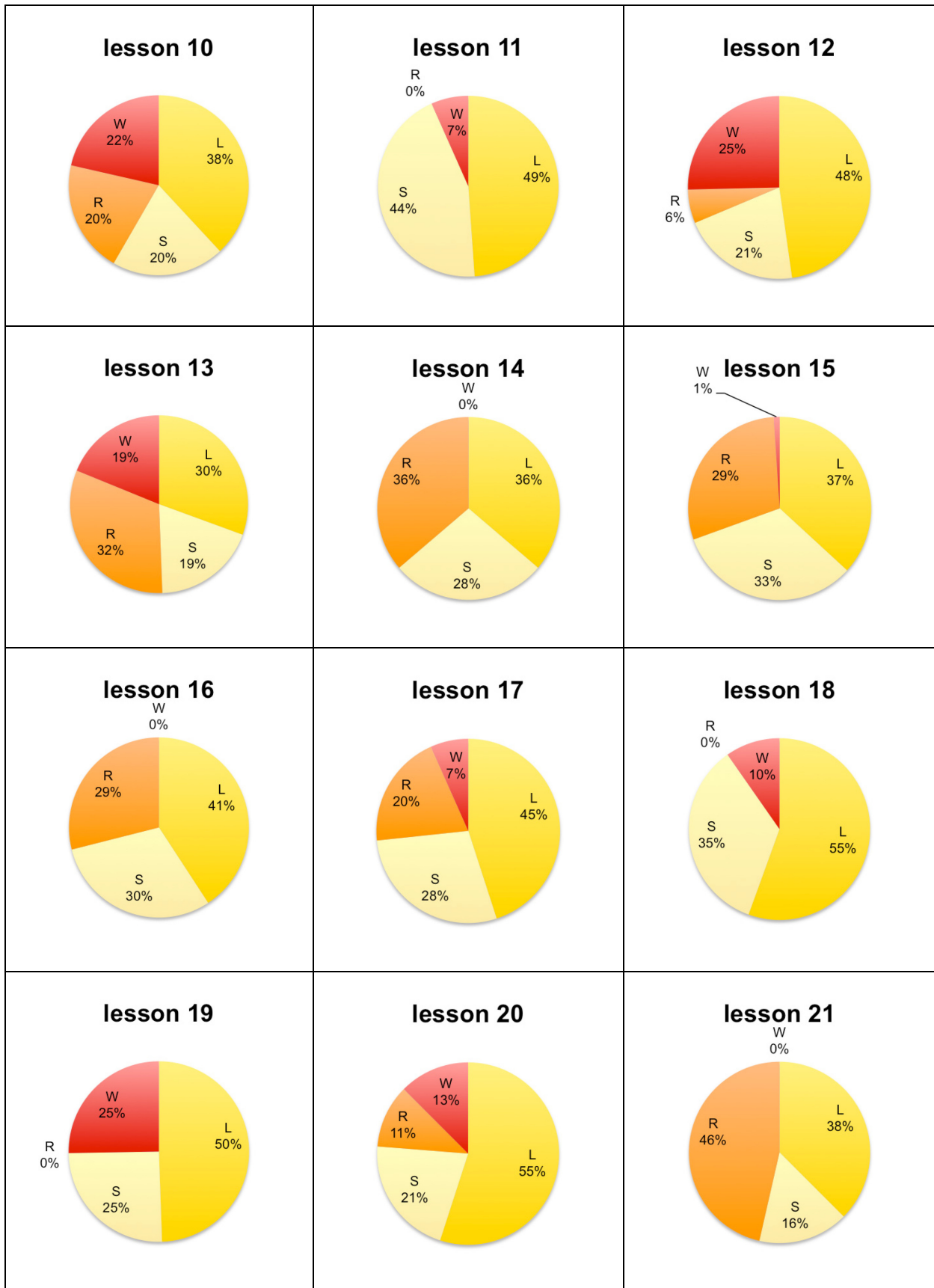
LESSON	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	
LISTENING	45	44	26	32	37	40	43	46	35	32	44	32	26	29	35	31	27	40	45	44	21	34	14	802
teacher	22	28	18	32	26	24	17	17	21	15	21	24	20	13	7	21	12	30	36	19	21	19	14	477
student(s)	25	27	13	13	22	29	36	34	30	23	30	13	7	22	31	19	16	23	21	22	3	23	4	486
native	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	21	16	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	64
audio-file	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	11	0	4	0	27
video	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10
content	0	8	0	0	2	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	19
detail	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	4	0	18
SPEAKING	37	38	14	17	25	29	36	36	27	17	40	14	16	22	31	23	17	25	23	17	9	24	4	541
MONOLOGICAL	0	4	11	0	17	11	17	21	17	8	22	0	4	4	11	17	0	1	6	7	0	6	3	187
presentation	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	9	3	3	22	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	54
present results	0	4	0	0	17	11	17	12	14	5	0	0	4	4	11	17	0	1	0	7	0	6	3	133
spontaneous	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	9	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	29
scripted	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3	22	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	26
DIALOGICAL	37	34	3	17	25	24	23	18	16	9	12	14	11	21	20	6	17	23	21	13	9	18	3	394
pair work	0	0	0	0	4	7	0	6	2	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	2	0	30
group work	21	13	0	0	0	9	7	0	0	6	0	0	0	15	17	10	12	3	0	9	0	0	0	122
plenum	0	0	3	17	18	0	12	1	5	3	7	0	0	1	0	4	0	16	19	0	7	5	0	118
answer questions	15	19	3	17	10	8	15	8	9	0	10	14	8	4	0	3	1	15	3	4	4	8	3	181
ask questions	0	2	0	2	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	11	4	0	0	1	1	2	5	0	5	1	0	37
transactional	26	29	0	9	5	9	12	6	5	4	0	0	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	9	0	7	0	132
interactional	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	11	5	3	5	0	0	15	20	2	16	14	0	0	0	5	0	101
READING	0	0	22	7	6	22	1	12	20	17	0	4	27	29	28	22	12	0	0	9	26	6	13	283
intensive	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	6
extensive	0	0	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16
for gist	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	12	8	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	27
skimming	0	0	16	0	0	1	0	0	0	7	0	0	12	3	20	4	3	0	0	0	25	0	11	102
scanning	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	15
silently	0	0	22	0	3	7	0	1	6	7	0	0	12	14	19	13	12	0	0	9	26	6	13	170
aloud	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	11	14	10	0	4	15	12	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	80
book	0	0	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	18
educational text	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	12	20	4	0	4	25	0	0	22	0	0	0	5	0	3	13	110
handout	0	0	6	7	6	21	1	0	0	13	0	0	0	29	28	0	12	0	0	4	26	0	0	153
WRITING	9	10	0	19	34	24	27	5	0	18	6	17	16	0	1	0	4	7	23	10	0	19	24	273
copying of board	4	3	0	8	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	23	0	0	11	0	64
note taking	5	7	0	0	6	16	7	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2	4	0	4	0	2	0	58
fill in a worksheet	0	0	0	2	28	8	7	2	0	8	0	11	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	9	4	2	99
words or sentences	0	0	0	9	0	0	2	0	0	10	6	4	4	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	39
write a text	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	22	22

Table 3: Observation results

The occurrence of the four language skills in the 23 observed lessons

The table below includes one pie chart for each of the 23 observed lessons and provides information about the occurrence and distribution of the four language skills in these.





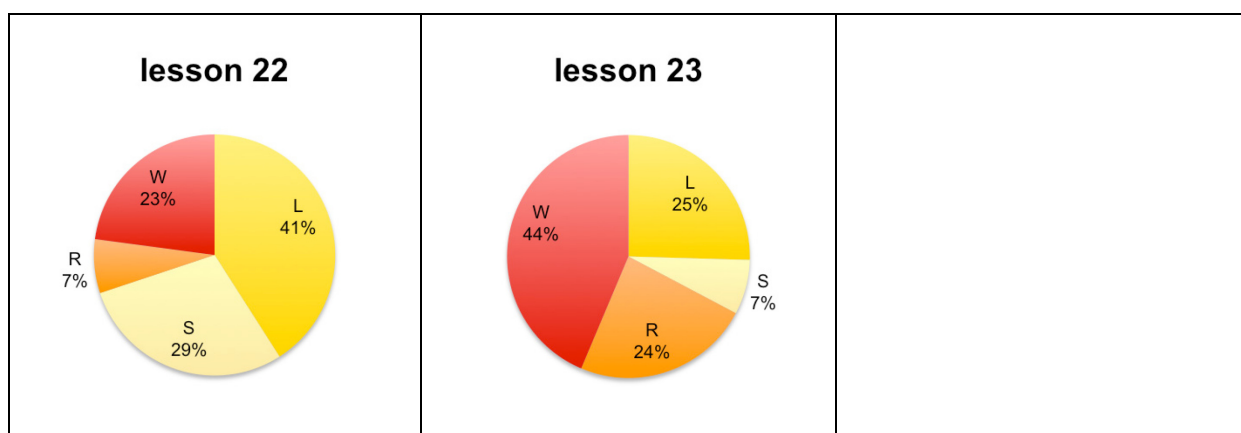


Table 4: The occurrence of the four language skills

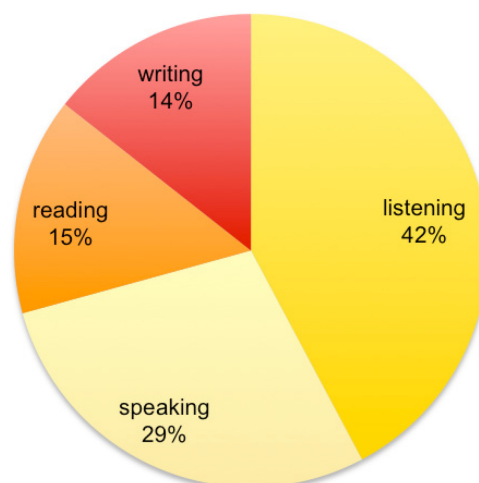
It appears from the table that in 13 out of 23 lessons all four skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing do occur. In 11 of these 13 lessons listening is the most frequent skill accounting for minimum 35 per cent. In the remaining two lessons the skill with the highest percentage is on the one hand reading and on the other, writing, accounting for 32 and 44 per cent respectively. The least frequent skill in the 13 lessons with all four skills is 7 times reading, 4 times writing, 1 time writing and speaking and 1 time speaking.

In the rest of the lessons, namely 9, only three skills occur. The figures show that in 5 of these 9 lessons, the skill that does not occur is either reading or writing. That is to say, reading does not take place in 5, and writing does not appear in 4 out of these 9 lessons. With regard to these lessons, it can further be observed that listening is in all but one the most frequent skill (36-55%). The skill that occurs most in the remaining lesson, namely lesson 21, is of course not listening (38%) but reading (46%).

Overall, it appears that the four language skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing do all appear in many lessons but do not receive equal attention.

The distribution of the four language skills in Austrian EFL classrooms

The distribution of the four language skills in all 23 lessons is represented by Figure 3. It appears from the data that, with 42 per cent, listening is the most frequent skill. Speaking accounts for 29 per cent takes up almost a third of the time and is thus the second most frequent skill. With 15 per cent



reading is the third common skill observed in the lessons and is as almost as frequent as writing which accounts for 14 per cent. It follows from this data that, in the 23 observed English as a foreign language lessons, more time was allocated to the oral skills, listening and speaking than to the written skills, reading and writing.

Figure 3: Distribution of the four language skills

Listening

The next three charts provide information about the listening skill.

Figure 4 provides information about the speakers students are confronted with in their English lessons. It appears from the chart that of the time students listen to a speaker present in class, one half is allocated to listening to the teacher while the other half is dedicated to fellow students. With regard to listening to the teacher, it can further be seen that listening to an Austrian teacher accounts for 43 per cent while listening to a native teacher only takes up 7 per cent. This relatively low percentage can be explained by the fact that of the 23 lessons observed, only three were taught by a native teacher.

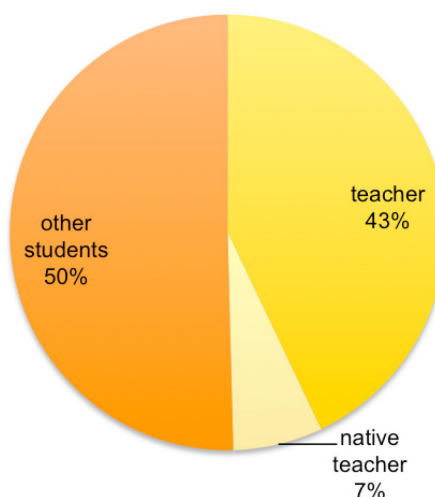


Figure 4: Listening to the teacher vs. listening to other students

The next two pie charts (Figure 5 and Figure 6) relate to listening to recorded material.

Figure 5 shows that listening to an audio-file accounts for more than two thirds of the time students listen to tapes. Hence, listening to video-clips, which besides audible input also provide visual clues only make up 27 per cent of the time language learners listening to recordings.

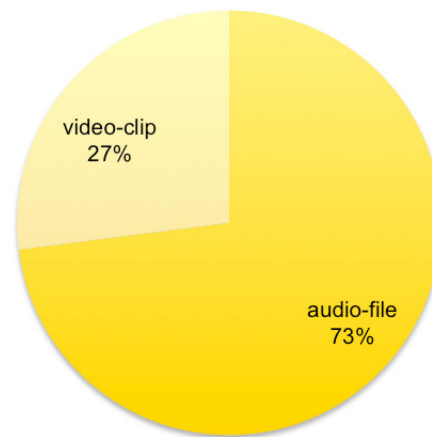


Figure 5: Audio-file vs. video-clip

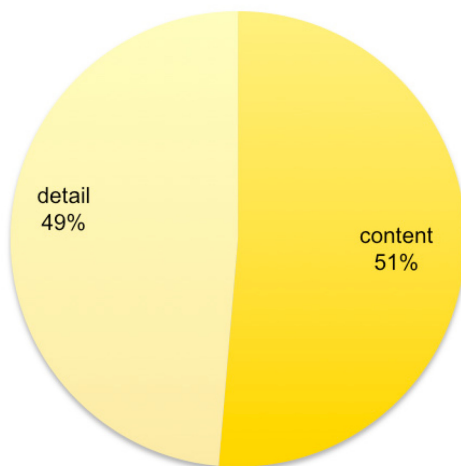


Figure 6: Listening for detail vs. listening for content

Figure 6 is concerned with the purposes for listening to cassettes, CDs or videos. It reveals that the time spent on listening for content and listening for detail is almost identical as the percentage for listening for the first (51%) is only 2 per cent higher than for the latter (49%).

Speaking

In the following paragraphs the results of the oral productive skill speaking will be provided.

Analyzing the distribution of monological and dialogical speech it appears from Figure 7 that the latter accounts for 68 per cent and is as such two times more frequent than the first. Hence, it can be said that students are regularly engaged in interaction but rarely have to produce longer turns of speech.

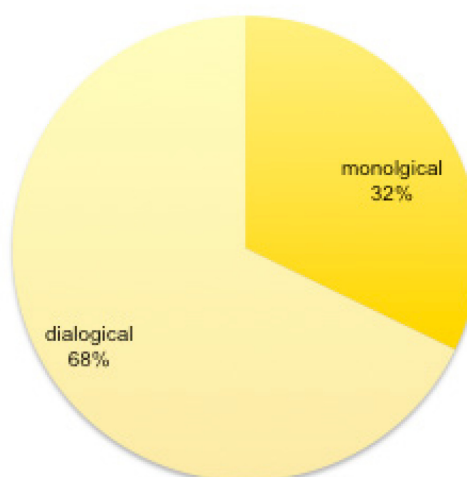


Figure 7: Monological vs. dialogical speech

Monological speech

With regard to monological speech it appears from the respective pie chart (Figure 8) that of the time students are engaged in longer turns of speech, 71 per cent is dedicated to the presentation of results of previous exercises. The rest, namely approximately one third of monological student speaking time, is made up by presentations.

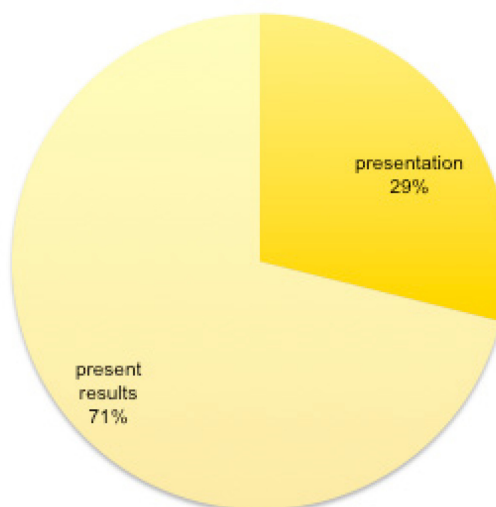


Figure 8: Presenting results vs. presentation

Dialogical speech

The distribution of students' opportunities to engage in dialogical speech is presented by Figure 9.

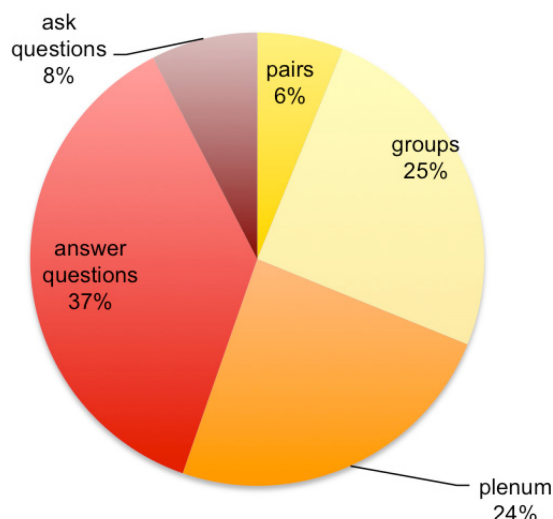


Figure 9: Dialogical speech opportunities

It appears from the pie chart that the majority of the time spent on dialogical speaking, namely 37 percent, is allocated to language learners answering teacher questions. Students actively asking questions, in contrast, accounts for only 8 per cent. Answering questions is followed by dialogical speech as part of group or plenary work, which account for 25 and 24 per cent respectively and as such make up half of the time together. Pair work, in which students as in larger

groups need to cooperate, appears to be rather rare as it only occurs in 6 per cent of the class time allocated to dialogical speech.

Another aspect, which has been observed in relation to dialogical speaking time, is shown in the next pie chart. Figure 10 includes percentages for interactional and transactional speech. It reveals that the latter, which is the communication of information in order to fulfill a task accounts for 57 per cent while the first, which can be regarded as some sort of casual conversation makes up the rest, namely 43 per cent.

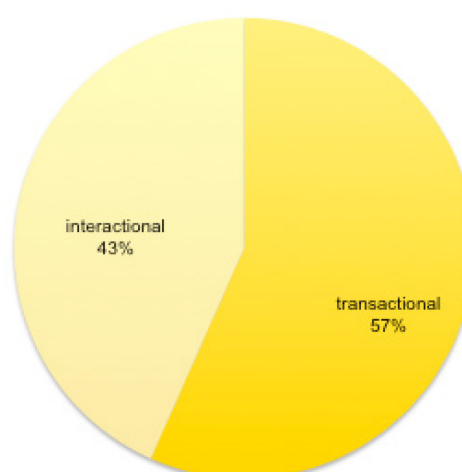


Figure 10: Interactional vs. transactional speech

Reading

The following three charts are concerned with the reading skill.

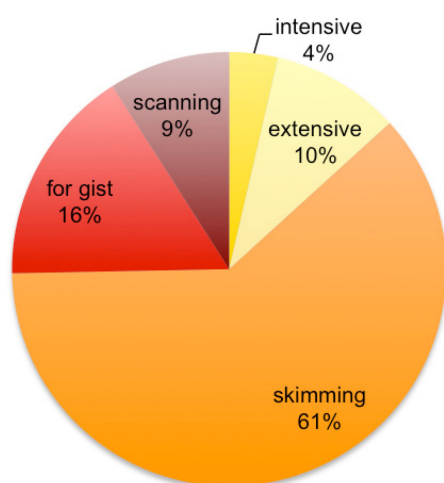


Figure 11: Types of reading

reading. Slow and careful intensive reading is, with 4 per cent the least common reading style in the observed EFL classrooms.

Figure 11 provides results for the apportionment of the various reading style categories of the observational schedule. According to the chart, it appears that skimming accounts for almost half of the time and is as such by far the most frequent reading style. This is followed by reading for gist which accounts for 16 per cent. With 9 and 10 per cent respectively, almost equal time is allocated to scanning and extensive reading.

With regard to the reading mode, it appears from Figure 12 that reading silently is more common than reading aloud. This means that in 68 per cent of the reading in class is silent reading as part of which students are given the freedom to process the information of a text individually and at their own pace. Reading aloud, which in education has

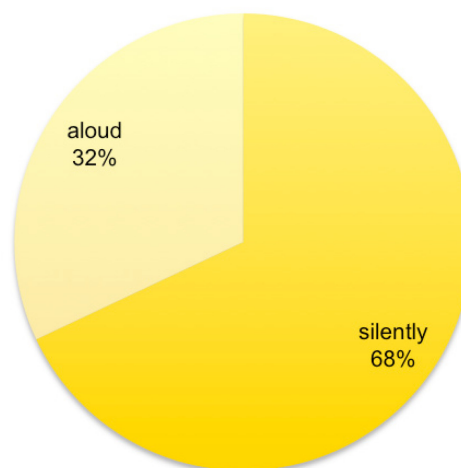


Figure 12: Reading aloud vs. reading silently

often been criticized for not being useful, consequently makes up the rest, namely 32 per cent.

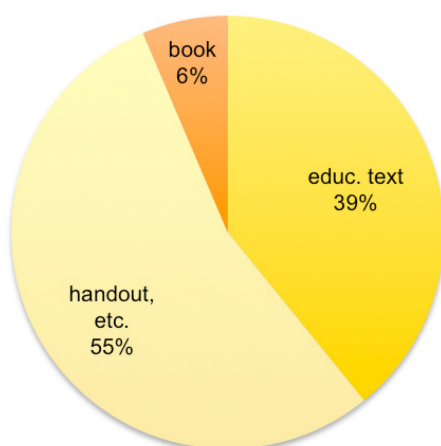


Figure 13: Reading texts

educational texts, which are specifically written for language students, and thus working with these makes up 39 per cent. Reading books in class is, in general, very rare and consequently only accounts for 6 per cent.

Writing

The final pie chart (Figure 14) presents the distribution of the different types of writing. More than one third of the time spent on writing is allocated to “filling in a worksheet”. Copying from the board and note taking account for 23 and 20 per cent respectively and as such do occur almost equally often. This is followed by writing single words or

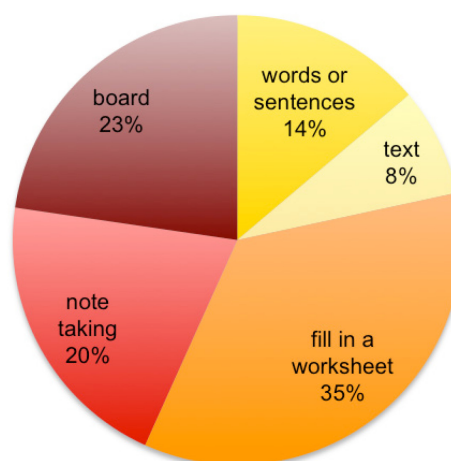


Figure 14: Writing

sentences which makes up 14 per cent of the writing in class and mostly occurred as part of dictations. The lowest amount of time is spent on writing a text of any length, which in fact only appeared in one observed lesson and thus accounts for only 8 per cent.

7.2 Presentation of Teacher Interview Results

In order to gain further insights into the teaching of the four language skills, and derive possible explanations for the outcome of the observations, three interviews were conducted. These interviews, which were done with teachers who also took part in the observations, all had a duration of approximately 30 minutes. All interviews were recorded, so that it was possible to compile a transcript of each, which can be found in the appendix. In the following a summary of each interview will be provided.

Interview 1

Interview partner 1 is a female English and History teacher who has been teaching for five years now; 1 year in a teacher training college and 4 years in a BAKIP.

Generally, this teacher thinks that in terms of weighting it would be perfect to assign 25% to each of the four language skills in English as a foreign language lessons. Nevertheless, as this is, in fact difficult to put into practice, she tries to integrate a minimum of two skills into each of her lessons.

Writing, however, is the skill she does rather assign as homework than teach in her lessons. With regard to this it follows that for interview partner 1, writing is, due to different reasons the most difficult skill to integrate into English lessons. First, writing is extremely time consuming. Hence, with only 2 English lessons per week it is almost impossible to regularly train writing in class. Second, language learners' writing levels do vary considerably. That is to say, some students have difficulties composing coherent and well-structured texts during a lesson while others are able to write a perfect text within half an hour of class-time. This could, according to the interview partner, also result from the fact that some learners have problems concentrating in class and thus prefer to write in a quiet place, without time pressure. Thus, this teacher regularly assigns writing as homework although she knows that this is rather conservative. Hence she would actually like to integrate writing into her lessons more often, as this would allow her to give the students straight feedback on their performance.

As opposed to writing, the interview partner thinks that reading and listening are rather easy to organize, although students have different reading speed and ease in listening. Reading as well as listening activities are, according to this teacher, easy to

integrate into one's lessons because as a matter of fact there are many materials available. There are activities concerned with all kinds of topics and it is always possible to use listening and reading as a stimulus for other activities.

Talking about language students, this teacher believes that of the four language skills, speaking and especially monological speech is the most challenging. In class students' speaking is often limited to one-word answers. Language learners rarely have to produce (spontaneous) prolonged talks about a specific topic and thus face difficulties in expressing their ideas and formulating their opinions.

Dialogical speech, in contrast, is less of a problem because in groups students tend to feel more comfortable and are consequently not afraid of speaking up. Nevertheless, monitoring group work is challenging for teachers and bears the risk of learners switching to their mother tongue. Therefore, the interview partner prefers to do prolonged group works with the help of the school's language assistant because in a team it is easier to meet the students' needs. Apart from that, the presence of a native speaker, in many cases has a motivating effect and leads to students being more active.

With regard to course materials, the interview partner finds that most of the materials do cover the four language skills almost equally. Nevertheless, according to her observations, there might be a slight tendency to more reading than listening, speaking or writing activities. On the whole, she definitely thinks that there is a development in EFL course books and also believes that the current materials are compatible with the Austrian curriculum. Many EFL books already cover the four language skills, include sub-skills and provide activities to prepare the students for the new A-levels. However, it was pointed out that the choice of book is decisive because as a matter of fact there are still many outdated books in circulation, which do not cover all skills equally or even miss out one or another.

Overall, one shortcoming of course books, in her view, is that they include many listening activities working with audio-files and only rarely provide video-clips. Videos, in her opinion, are more appealing to students and should thus be used more often. Video-clips provide visual clues so that language learners are often faced with less problems understanding the message. Besides, the use and implementation of video-clips allows students to become active themselves because students can easily contribute videos to class themselves. Many videos on the Internet are

concerned with class topics and students who come across such clips realize that English is something that does not only happen in the classroom but is out there, is a world language.

Looking at the past, the present and the future of the teaching of the four language skills, the interview partner said that she herself definitely experienced a development. Speaking, as she observed, gained importance in the last years and will in her opinion also continue to become more important in the future because it is the most important skill for everyday life. Moreover, writing, in her view, is, of high importance in language teaching as it makes up 50% of the students' final A-level grade.

Finally, the interview partner mentioned that during her school time it was still common that certain skills were neglected while others were taught extensively. In the present, this is not the case anymore because nowadays there is a focus on equality of the four language skills in EFL classroom, which is likely to continue in the future.

Interview 2

Interview partner 2 is an English and Italian teacher and has a teaching experience of about 14 years. Up to now she has been teaching in three different AHS and did "BFI Berufsreifeprüfung" evening courses for 2 years.

With regard to the four language skills, she believes that the weighting of listening, speaking, reading and writing in EFL lessons should be balanced, with each skill accounting for 25 per cent. Nevertheless, with regard to time spent on the different skills things, in her opinion, are different, because writing, for example, is extremely time consuming and can easily be done at home without a teacher being present. Consequently, interview partner 2 aims at equal weighting of the four skills but does not spend equal time on each skill in her lessons. Most of the time of her lessons is spent on speaking and listening, which happens automatically. There is always lesson-based as well as human interaction between the teacher and the students. Moreover, speaking has gained importance with the introduction of the new A-level tests and thus the interview partner frequently trains this skill with her students and also provides them with strategies and methods useful to manage spoken interaction.

Overall, the interview partner does not consciously think about the four language skills when devising her lessons. She believes that if a teacher relies on a course book, skills will automatically be integrated because as a matter of fact the books are designed in a way that it is almost impossible to stick with one language skill for too long. Apart from that, she mentioned that she is generally relying on her gut feeling and tries to tackle each topic from different angles, which serves the different skills automatically.

Nevertheless, this teacher feels that of the four skills reading is the most difficult to integrate into her lessons. For her reading often feels like a waste. Besides, language learners' reading speed is extremely different and the interview partner feels that she cannot help her students improve their reading skills.

Listening is, according to the interview partner, the easiest skill to integrate into English lessons, because whenever the teacher is talking, the students have to listen and thus listening is almost omnipresent. Apart from that, course materials do include a great variety of listening comprehensions.

With regard to the students and their difficulties with the language skills, the interview partner said that she could not tell which of the four skills represents the most challenging. She mentioned, that listening is a problem for some students because it is extremely fleeting. Besides, she also thinks that reading causes problems for many students, which can also be seen in international reading exams where the results of Austrian students tend to be behind expectations.

Talking about language learners' homework, interview partner two mentioned that the most common skill her students practice at home is writing. The teacher said that with regard to homework assignments writing is extremely convenient because it is easy to check whether the students did or did not do it. Besides writing the interview partners' students sometimes also have to do reading homework, although it is more complicated to check on it. Only recently her students sometimes also have to record themselves. Thereby the learners get the chance to practice their monological speaking skills and the teacher is able to give the students feedback on their oral performance.

As far as course materials are concerned, the interview partner said that they are the basis of teaching but teachers are free to adapt the provided activities to their needs. Generally, this teacher does not like the Austrian course books very much although

she believes that they have developed positively and do cover all four language skills. However, she is not completely convinced by the Austrian course books as she thinks that they lose out of sight the very teaching and language acquisition.

Overall, the interview partner believes that with respect to the four language skills nothing will change anymore in the future because the many school experiments in Austria have already caused a change of status of the four language skills. That is to say, in recent years the four skills and especially listening as well as speaking became of greater importance in English as a foreign language classrooms. The only thing she can imagine is that there will be a change in language teaching triggered by the development of new technological means.

Interview 3

Interview partner three is a male vocational school teacher with an experience of about 16 years. He teaches English, some lessons of French and further does two different school autonomous CLIL courses which are called “International Communication and Business” and “International Business and Tourism”.

With regard to the four language skills, speaking is the skill to which this teacher assigns most priority. In his lessons he focuses on both spoken production and interaction because at the end of the school time all students regardless of the course they take have to do an oral exam. Apart from that proximity of vocational schools with the real world, in his opinion, call for the practice of speaking skills because students need to acquire the ability to present themselves, present a project, give a powerful presentation and defend their views powerfully. It follows that of the four skills it is speaking which takes most of the time in the interview partner's lessons and accounts for about 50 per cent. The second most prominent skill making up about 20 to 25 per cent is writing and here especially written production. According to the teacher, this skill is of importance because all students need to take a final written exam and should further know how to write a letter of application, abstracts and other texts. They need some academic writing skills to manage real-life challenges and succeed in the real world after completing secondary education. The remaining 25 percent is then dedicated to listening and reading.

Nevertheless, the interview partner thinks that in the future he will probably have to increase reading and listening training as with the new Matura the receptive skills are given more prominence.

Writing is, in this teacher's opinion, the most difficult skill to integrate into English lessons because in-class writing is, without doubt, extremely time consuming. Besides there is a huge gap between language learner's writing level, which means that some learners do easily write a good text within an hour while others face considerable problems. Hence, it is difficult for teachers to cater for the needs of all students. In contrast to that, listening and reading are, according to the interview partner language skills which are easy to integrate into one's lessons. A reason for this is that with nowadays' technological means it is easy to provide students with audio-files and different texts. Hence, they can practice their listening and reading skills independently without the presence of any teacher.

In terms of the students, this teacher believes that writing represents the most challenging skill because it requires a high amount of patience and also maturity. In his view, it is further a generational thing because in contrast to the past in which the receptive skills received most attention, we are now living in an oral era focusing on speaking. Therefore, students often face problems in writing and do not know how to successfully get across their ideas and structure their texts. Apart from that, some students have problems due to their German background. That is to say, they are used to write sentences consisting of several sub clauses and thus have troubles with the economical style of English.

Besides writing, it is also reading which results challenging for many students. With nowadays technology language learners are able to listen to English music and have access to an endless number of video-clips but do normally not read much in the target language during their spare time and are consequently better at listening and speaking than reading or writing.

Although writing and reading are difficult for many students, they are the skills which students mostly have to train as part of their homework.

Talking about course materials and the four skills, this teacher said that books are getting better but still do not offer a balance of the four skills. Most of the books are now aligned with the new Bifie test formats and as such do not really focus on the teaching but rather on the testing of the language skills.

With regard to the skills he further mentioned that the course books mostly provide reading material and also include a great amount of listening activities. Speaking activities are, however, often not concerned with the training of speaking skills but focus on grammar and form. With regard to writing, the interview partner said that most of the books take a product approach and disregard the process approach so that the students do not receive the chance to train various writing staged and find out moves themselves.

Taking a look at the past, the present and the future of the four language skills the teacher mentioned that the receptive skills have gained importance. Listening and reading are now skills in their own right and no longer only serve as an input used to train the productive skills. Apart from that, he also believes that the teaching of writing will change in the future. Writing for writing will receive more attention while writing for learning will lose importance.

To sum up, it can be said that all teachers do agree that the weighting of the four language skills should be balanced. With regard to time allocated to the four skills, they said that speaking is the one that receives most. Furthermore, all three interview partners each mentioned writing as being a difficult skill to integrate into one's lesson and said that this is with reading the skill their students most often have to do as part of their homework. Talking about the students the interviewed teachers believe that monological speech, reading and also writing are challenging for language learners. Regarding course materials, all three teachers see a development but think that further improvement is required. Taking a look at the past, the present and the future, the interview results show that the teachers themselves experienced various approaches to the teaching of the four language skills and believe that in the future listening, speaking, reading and writing will continue to be of central importance in language teaching.

7.3 Summary of Results

The research on the occurrence and distribution of the four language skills shows that in Austrian English as a foreign language lessons listening, speaking, reading and writing do all occur with regularity. Nevertheless, it appears from Figure 3 that the distribution of the language skills in the present study is far from being balanced as the oral skills do receive considerably more attention than the literacy skills. That is to say, students receive more in-class practice in listening and speaking than in reading and writing.

One reason for the prominence of the spoken skills is that all interviewed teachers believe speaking to be the skill of most relevance for their students' future and thus integrate speaking activities into their English lessons on a regular basis. The high percentage of listening results from the fact that listening does almost always occur in combination with speaking and is also trained by means of listening to audio- and video-recordings. What is striking with regard to the present study is that listening to fellow students is as frequent as listening to the teacher. This implies that there was a balance of student and teacher talking time in the investigated lessons. Hence, it can be said that the language learners in the observed English as a foreign language classrooms got the chance to actively use and thereby practice the target language.

With regard to listening to recorded material, it is interesting that although it is nowadays possible to access an unlimited number of video clips, audio recordings are used with more frequency. The main reason for this is, that course books do still almost exclusively include audio-files, although the interviewed teachers all enjoy using video clips as they are more appealing to their students.

The low percentage of reading and writing can be traced back to the fact that these two skills, are according to the three interviewed teachers, the most common to be assigned as homework. Apart from that, it appears from the interviews that the teachers have problems integrating these two skills into their lessons, as the students' abilities in reading and writing differ considerably. Moreover, writing is very time consuming and can thus not be practiced in class as often as the other skills.

Overall, it appears that it is a challenge for teachers to assign equal attention to all four language skills. Of course, it is necessary to integrate listening, speaking, reading and writing into EFL lessons but as a matter of fact, some skills require more in-class practice than others.

8 CONCLUSION

The four language skills listening, speaking, reading and writing are central to language learning and thus do play a central role in English as a foreign language classrooms. Given this importance of the skills for language teaching, this thesis aimed at providing an insight into the various dimensions of the four skills and an analysis of their role in Austrian English as a foreign language classrooms.

Overall, it was shown in the first part of this paper that the various influential teaching approaches of the last century all put different focus on the four skills. The Grammar Translation Method focuses on reading and writing and at the same time disregarded speaking and listening, which were central to the Direct Method that developed as a reaction to the former. The Reading Approach, as the name suggests, puts its focus mainly on reading and does not as the Audiolingual Method or the Oral-Situational Approach promote the development of oral skills. The Cognitive Approach, which emerged in the 1960s, emphasizes the necessity of all four language skills to develop target language proficiency. The Affective-Humanistic approach does, in contrast to the others, not focus on the development of language skills but puts the learners themselves into the center of attention. The primary skill in the Comprehension-Based Approach to language teaching is listening because scholars in favor of this approach believe that this listening will enable language learners to develop speaking, reading and writing skills. The Communicative Approach, which is the most popular language teaching approach of the time, highlights the communicative aspects of language and promotes the teaching of all four language skills as they are necessary for successful interaction and communication in the target language. It follows from this development of the teaching of the four skills that the status of each of them changed throughout history. That is to say, throughout history listening, speaking, reading and writing did all gain importance with regard to language teaching and learning. The mastery of each skill calls for extensive training because it involves various types of knowledge and an awareness of different underlying processes. Moreover, listening, speaking, reading and writing do all comprise a variety of sub-skills, which need to be trained as they are necessary to master communication and comprehension in the target language. Hence, the language skills are now anchored in the Austrian language curricula which state that

listening, speaking, reading and writing must be trained and should receive equal attention in the language classroom.

The empirical study presented in this thesis therefore investigated the occurrence and distribution of the different components of listening, speaking, reading and writing ability by means of highly structured classroom observations conducted in three different Viennese schools.

With regard to the question of weight and time allocated to each of the four skills, the results show that in Austrian English as a foreign language lessons the four skills are not equally balanced as the AHS foreign language curriculum suggests because listening and speaking are more common than reading and writing. That is to say, students receive more training in the oral than the literacy skills. Teachers actually support this because they believe that language learners can easily train their writing and reading skills individually while speaking, which is in their view the most important skill, is difficult to practice outside class.

To conclude, it can be said that it is almost impossible to assign equal time to each of the skills within class-time. However, with regard to weighting teachers aim at a balance in order to accomplish a holistic approach to English language teaching.

To sum up, language learning cannot be reduced to mere class-time but also includes self-study outside school, which has not been regarded within this thesis' study. Apart from that, it has to be noted that the results of the present research are based on 23 lessons only and can thus not be regarded as a reflection of all Austrian English as a foreign language classrooms. Given these limitations, it may therefore be suggested for future studies to conduct the same research with a bigger sample or with a more specific focus (e.g. AHS/BHS, one language level only, etc.). Furthermore, a more representative view of the reality of the teaching of the four skills in Austria could be achieved by extending the classroom observation to a longer period of time, for instance a semester or even an entire school year.

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10 APPENDIX

This appendix includes the detailed observational schedules of the 23 lessons observed for the purpose of this study on the occurrence and distribution of listening, speaking, reading and writing in Austrian English as a foreign language classrooms and further provides the transcripts of the three teacher interviews.

LESSON 1

[illegible]

LESSON 2

[illegible]

Lesson 3

[illegible]

LESSON 4

[illegible]

LESSON 5

[illegible]

LESSON 6

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
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teacher	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓			✓								✓	✓					✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
student(s)				✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
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LESSON 7

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LESSON 8

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LESSON 9

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LESSON 10

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LESSON 14

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LESSON 22

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LESSON 23

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INTERVIEW 1

S1: First of all thank you for the interview and first I would like you to introduce yourself a little bit and answer the questions for how long have you been teaching where have you been teaching and what is your second subject.

S2: Ok, ähm should I say my name as well or is it anonymic

S1: I guess it's not

S2: Well I'm, I'm 34 years old, living in Vienna, well I have been teaching for 5 years ah now, äh 4 years in Bakip 8 äh a training college for nursery teachers and a year before that I was in a training college for tourism, well my second subject is history but I hardly teach it I only have one class per year so I mostly teach English

S1: Ok, so lets turn to the four language skills ähm my first question is how much weight would you like to assign to each of the four skills in your lessons?

S2: I want to, so not how much I

S1: you want to yeah

S2: ähbm actually I'm I'm of course perfect would be like 25% each. I always try to have at least two ähm in my lessons, so either it's reading and speaking or listening and writing. I rather neglect writing I I introduce some topics äh kind of ähm or some genres like and we discuss it but actually that students write in the lesson it really hardly occurs so the focus is more ähm so therefore my aim is actually I want to spend more time on writing and speaking

S1: yeah

S2: I rather neglect it I must say

S1: ok so that's actually one of my questions, so is ähm then writing one of the skills your students have to train at home as part of their homework

S2: yeah mainly

S1: ok so that's the skill for homework or is there another skill you really often

S2: well that's actually the skill for homework still its very conservative I must say from the style of teaching

S1: mhhm

S2: and ähm so I would like to on something more on the writing in the lessons to give them straight feedback on their writing. mostly we do listening and reading ähm then we analyze the text äh finding chunks, word patterns, phrases, doing vocabulary exercises maybe talking and finding pros and cons, ideas, arguments, supporting details ähm for the topic but then ähm they get a writing homework very often where they should then use the phrases, use the ideas from the reading, form the listening ähm what we have collected ähm that they also use ähm

interruption

should we make a break and sit inside the computer room

S1: yeah

S2: maybe it's better because he is then going to print as well. I'm very sorry

S1: Don't worry that's school life

S2: It's not that easy to find a quiet place

interruption

S2: ok ähm yes so it's about the writing they mostly do at home I correct it and then I give them feedback on their writing

S1: so they have more freedom ähm of time to

S2: yes they have more time sometimes I do some group works, so they have to write a text

S1: mhhm

S2: äh in pairs or in a small group of four three or four

S1: ok

S2: that they work together this works as well or just to write one paragraph for example and then they read it aloud

S1: yeah

S2: and ähm I give them feedback or they just should write the first paragraph of their homework and I give them feedback if they or they start to do a mind map in school and I look at the structure and just to get them on the on the äh right track and say well yes this is äh this is good this is how you can carry on at home

S1: okay cool so ähm yeah you don't try to assign equal attention because it's kind of not really possible I guess ähm but which of the four skills is in your opinion the most difficult to integrate into your lessons and which one is the easiest, so is t writing, the most difficult or

S2: yes I think so because ähm I mean with the reading and you have exercises and working on vocabulary äh just when I think of time management it's easier to organize I must say and really it's it's the pre-reading task and of course there are some who are faster in their reading than others but still it's easier to manage in the class, with the writing äh some you know it varies a lot

S1: yeah

S2: yeah äh among the students so some also have difficulties to concentrate in class

S1: yeah

S2: even if I say well now we have 20 minutes lest take your time, start with the homework, start with your writing äh some are done by the end of the lesson, others haven't even started with it

S1: yeah

S2: äh and when I ask them I say I got to do it at home then it's quiet ähm they really can't really focus then on their writing

S1: I guess so yeah

S2: and ähm it is difficult yeah yeah it's for me

S1: and the most äh the easiest skill is?

S2: is reading and listening I must say yeah maybe I'm better trained already in it to teach it but ähm also I like then the varies some do jigsaws or you know different activities to ähm to work on vocabulary from the reading and listening

S1: yeah

S2: äh listening it's not just from the CD it's Youtube clip and well and then it's 50 minutes, so when you have reading or listening so some impuls ähm and then you talk about it, then you collect ideas the lesson is over

S1: the lesson is over yeah

S2: äh so and writing just takes up too a lot of time actually and we just have two hours like in the third year, while in the first or the second year they have three hours of English ähm so

then it's it's I try to include it more into my lessons actually the writing and so they should get a chance to do it also in class sometimes

S1: but would you also say then that it is the most äh difficult skill for you as a teacher to monitor writing in and stuff like that or would it actually be easy to teach writing but there is just not time for it

S2: äh no I think it's also difficult to teach äh in the sense you can provide them with phrases äh with the structure ähm but as I said the students are very different in their writing äh so some already yeah some have still difficulties how to structure their ideas

S1: mmmm

S2: ähm and then you have to talk with them again how do you put your ideas into proper paragraphs ähm and others they just start writing and äh have a coherent text and it's perfectly well and do not I mean the good thing is that sometimes they also ask ähm to wrote a text all together but I think for me it's quite difficult

S1: mhhm

S2: because there are so many different ideas ähm for me it's difficult getting all these ideas, putting them in a coherent text

S1: yeah

S2: yeah because äh and also having their ideas in the text because of course when I do it I have already kind of a ähm my finished text in my mind, so I really have to be careful that I take up their ideas

S1: yeah

S2: äh

S1: cause it should be their text and not

S2: it should be their text yes, ähm so but it should be properly organized and kind of also full of sophisticated vocabulary ähm so it's quite demanding and this really this sums up a whole lesson I must say yeah this really consumes a whole lesson

S1: yeah so writing is the most challenging

S2: yes yeah yes it's definitely the most challenging for me

S1: okay, well so much for teaching, now just a little bit about course materials so which role do course materials play in teaching the four language skills in a balanced way? because actually the Austrian curriculum ähm states that you have to assign equal attention to each skill but it's just kind of not possible and äh do the course materials reflect this approach of teaching them in a balanced way or is there a skill which is kind of neglected?

S2: ähm they do the course materials when I think of the books we use, they do have reading, ähm there might be more focus on the reading because sometimes they include two reading texts and just one listening and one writing task and one speaking exercise, so there is a slightly tendency to more reading or to more yeah more reading exercises ähm compared to listening or speaking and writing but I must say we, I'm not into the new book we get next year ähm but we have chosen it because we think äh it is equally paid attention on the four or there's paid attention equally on the four skills

S1: so you see that there is a development

S2: yes it's definitely yes, also to support the students äh also the speaking exercises is something which they have then the bullet points, the pictures already provided in the course books äh so I think it's there is some good material yes of course

S1: okay ähm and how are available course materials compatible with the Austrian curricula, so there is material

S2: yeah it depends on the course book actually, it really depends because now we have for example the course book we have now I do not really like it as it really focuses on the reading

S1: mhhm

S2: there is a very short listening, ähm, focusing on vocabulary which is kind of good äh but mostly the writing task is not appropriate to the whole unit, so I kind of always change the writing task

S1: okay

S2: hopefully with the other book it's better, it really depend on the course book

S1: so material are getting better

S2: they are getting better

S1: and in terms of, so I also observed kind of many sub-skills which are on this list like skimming, scanning

S2: okay

S1: or transactional interactional speaking and ähm is there a sub-skill or more sub-skills that are not sufficiently covered by the books so they don't receive training, for example if we talk about reading, is there really always like scanning, skimming, reading for gist or is it just reading for gist and is there a skill which is kind of neglected?

S2: äh no because of the new A-levels it is that the books, the new books, yeah they really try to cover äh all the different sub-skills, yes, so of course not within one unit, yeah, they might just focus on skimming of course not all sub-skills occur in each unit but actually they really try to vary

S1: okay

S2: of course there is not the perfect book äh it gives them kind of a structure also for me as a teacher and then I give them extra material, Youtube clips, websites which I use, ähm but I must say well yeah ähm yes they try try also o cover, with the reading I know to cover the sub-skills äh (.) I'm just looking at the other sub-skills

S1: mhhm

S2: speaking

S1: listening, is there like more a focus on audio-files or video-files and do you prefer ähm to listen to video-clips with your students or rather prefer audio-files?

S2: well, in the student's book there is more the focus on audio-file, äh, I actually I prefer videos as well

S1: yeah

S2: just as ähm students really you know they, sometimes the message is just clearer, having äh pictures, more it evokes more feelings ähm so I actually like video-clips but I must say I'm very fond of *Prime Time*

S1: mhm

S2: and *Prime Time* offers an online, online materials and there they have video-files

S1: okay, that's cool, I've never heard of

S2: that's why we also switched to *Prime Time* because I'm really fond of that ähm because it is an Austrian student's book ähm because when you teach English there are a lot of books from Britain as well but they really see that they cover up everything what is needed for the new A-levels and the online material they offer then video-clips as well yeah äh in the student's book they hardly have video-clips

S1: okay, so you think they should include more video-clips because it's kind of yeah attractive

S2: yeah yeah it's actually more appealing to them ähm because it kind of, of course, audio-tapes are just to focus on the listening and the different voices and not get distracted by the pictures

S1: yeah

S2: ähm but on the other hand teenagers just are on Facebook and they watch Youtube everyday

S1: constantly

S2: so you are up-to-date as a teacher, so I know my students really like it and say okay I found something on Youtube, and uh cool yes, so I really get their attention immediately

S1: yeah because there is so many clips outside

S2: yeah ähm even it's very interesting when I have an audio-file and sometimes I put it on my iPhone and then bring boxes and not a CD-player and they say oh cool you have an iPhone, oh yeah listen to it and it's (*laughter*) pretty cool, not having this old CD-player with me (*laughter*)

S1: I remember it like this huge CD-player

S2: and they all think it's more authentic, I think it's about authenticity they see on Youtube I can watch it and sometimes they come up with ideas and say ah two months ago I came across a video, I had it in the second time

S1: yeah last time when I did the observation

S2: yeah, exactly about food waste and then a student said ähm well I came across a Youtube clip

S1: they can become active because they can find their own things and always have the chance to re-listen and re-watch the videos

S2: and I think it really makes them clear when you have this ähm not just proper listenings from the teacher's CD that English is something that just happens in the English classroom, that when you use modern technology or real news, real texts from magazines, websites, really they they understand English is a world language, it is not something is restricted to the classroom, it is something that is out there and which opens the world for you

S1: that's a great idea

S2: and so that's why they sometimes get much more then into the language, than just having this proper on teacher's CD's

S1: yeah that's really good, so now let's turn to the students ähm which of the four skills do you think is the most challenging for your students?

S2: mhm speaking, then writing, I must even say the most challenging is speaking

S1: because they are afraid to speak up or they just ähm

S2: yeah it's very often neglected in school, I mean really to speak about a topic, they often have like yes no answers or just one-word answer, that's not, well speaking is, it's really to talk about a topic, to express their ideas, their opinion ähm, to suggest things I think they, it's often neglected in class yeah, I must say also in my lessons, äh now I try to focus a little bit more on speaking

S1: mhhm

S2: äh and yes they are very often, it's more spontaneous as well they can't prepare that well than writing task ähm and yes they are quite nervous, yes speaking in front of the class I have, every year I have some students they rather say can we do that rather in small groups

S1: mhhm, so you would say monological speaking is the skill they are afraid of

S2: yeah, yes

S1: and dialogical speaking, so in group work or pair work it's not that much of a problem?

S2: no, no it's not in a group especially it's not that much of a problem, of course always well, when you walk around and you do they think you won't listen to them they switch to German

S1: yeah

S2: I think that's a huge problem as well when you do speaking exercises in groups they just, that happens, when they have to do a group discussion that they switch to their mother tongue, ähm so you have to be really careful about that; monological speaking it's only, I did it once that they had to speak spontaneously, äh just say five minutes and now you speak about bananas, yeah spontaneously and it was actually fun because then they started, the first one was like, well, it's yellow, it is a fruit

S1: yeah

S2: ähm that's it and then to make them clear be creative there is much more to say äh especially when we were talking about environment, ähm food waste you can bring all that in

S1: yeah

S2: ähm healthy diet, yeah whatever but they have difficulties

S1: would you actually if you had time, would like to have speaking lessons because it is the skill they really need

S2: yeah it would be great, I must say I appreciate to have my language assistant with me because it's really then manageable that they speak English because if you have the whole class its difficult to see when they switch to their mother tongue,

so actually when I have my language assistant with me I focus more on speaking

S1: yeah and how do your students feel when they have to talk to a native?

S2: well they try harder actually, they really try harder, definitely, they would also like to impress the assistant, they participate more actively, especially the boys get interested, especially with female assistants

yeah it would be great to have support in class when doing speaking activities or a group discussion

S1: and I guess it's also with the native speakers they bring kind of authenticity and the culture inside the classroom and therefore it's kind of really motivating

S2: yeah exactly mhhhm, exactly that's a good point actually

S1: So yeah, we are almost done (*laughter*) so my last question is about the past, the present and the future of the four language skills so I would be interested in did you experience a change of importance of the four language skills during your teaching and also during your time of life with the school äh and how do you see the future of the four language skills, do you believe that there is a skill that will gain or lose attention or do you believe that this focus on equality will remain?

S2: I think I always äh what I have observed the last years is ähm, speaking is getting more important, äh there is more focus on the speaking, which is absolutely fine I must say this development I think will also continue in the future

S1: mhhm

S2: ähm as you said before speaking is a very important skill after school and also on holiday they need the speaking skill and also with the new A-levels, they can now choose between written and oral exam, so not all of them have to do a written exam in English, so therefore, I mean when we have a look at the A-levels writing, there is still a focus on the

writing as well as it takes up then 50 per cent, if it will stay like that, it takes up 50 per cent of the whole grade and then 0 per cent reading and listening together, yeah

S1: yeah

S2: so of course we have to focus more on writing in order that you prepare them as good as possible for their A-levels but the four skills also in the future I know what is planned in the future it is also when we think of assessing the pupils and in English when we should assess them then according to the four skills and in English they actually then have no one English grade but four English grades in the four skills, so definitely in the future there will or must be more focus on all four skills equally, yeah and this is also what then influences our teaching

S1: yeah

S2: I see it now, I see, well actually speaking it is important, there might be some who chose the oral exam in English so I have to prepare them also for their speaking, so I even notice now a slightly change in my teaching

S1: mhhm

S2: ähm towards speaking, ähm also writing, äh the coherence the structure, it's not all about, I think the last years there was more focus, still more focus on the accuracy

S1: yeah

S2: to say to have the vocabulary, the grammar correct but now it's also how many ideas do you put in your text, the coherence, paragraphing ähm, yeah that's why

S1: yeah I get what you mean because also at university there is really a focus on coherence, cohesion and how you present your main ideas and how do you provide support

S2: exactly

S1: so it is becoming more important, and how did you experience the four skills during your school time?

S2: Well it was basically the focus was very much still on grammar I must stay, there was a strong focus on grammar and reading

S1: yeah

S2: reading I think we, sometimes we didn't do listening at all, we got just one for the test

S1: mhhm

S2: äh sometimes we did one, so it was reading texts and the writing, that's why as a teacher I always have to be careful what did I experience and I, especially that I neglect the writing it's just doing, you know, for homework, it's kind of a little bit old-fashioned and it's what I was used to do, äh writing is something to do at home

S1: yeah

S2: that's something maybe to do with me personally as well because I have best concentration I have actually when it's quiet, when I'm alone in my office it's really when I can work best but of course some, I see now I'm changing it and the students appreciate this variety and the different focus and authenticity, I think it's the most important thing

S1: yeah that's it, I'm really thankful for your answers and yeah

S2: yeah your welcome, perfect timing

INTERVIEW 2

S1: First of all, I would like you to introduce yourself and answer the questions for how long have you been teaching in which schools and what is your second subject

S2: Ok, ähm so my name is Monika, I have been teaching for 14 years now I think, I have only been teaching AHS so far, English Italian, I have seen two school really, I did my "Praktikum" in one, so in total it would be three and I did "BFI Berufsreifeprüfung" for two years as an evening class

S1: Okay

S2: I think that's it for my experience

S1: Okay, thank you so let's turn to the four skills and a teaching and the teacher, so how much weights would you like to assign to each of the four skills in your lessons? (*laughter*)

S1: so what would be your kind of yeah

S2: well if you talk about weight then I think it should be balanced, it should be a quarter for each skill. if you talk about ähm time that is necessary for each skill then things are different because of you know things like writing, anybody can write at home, it's time consuming in the lesson and you would think there is no use in me being present in a writing phase as a teacher, so that's the easiest thing to have the kids take home but then again I think it does make sense to have it in the lesson because having some skill and practice in the lesson means it's got importance and it's monitored and I see how fast they are at writing and I see what they can do without help, for example without dictionary, without supporting material, internet and alike

S1: mhhm so you don't aim at equal time in the class and which skill is the one you pay most attention to then in class?

S2: ähm I think what automatically happens most is speaking because we have interaction that is not really lesson-based but is also human interaction in the classroom, so speaking listening is probably omnipresent ähm what I find has changed now with the new Matura is that I put much more focus on speaking

S1: mhm

S2: in terms of time, a lot of the time in my lesson is speaking now and I personally spend a lot of time on devising strategies ähm and methods for having people speak simultaneously

S1: yeah

S2: and still trying me as a teacher to have some impression on what they are doing, which is an impossibility in fact (*laughter*) but I'm I'm working in cloning (*laughter*)

S1: yeah, do you actually have an aim or do you tell yourself like every lesson I want to have at least two skills or something or does it really depend on the topic?

S2: yeah mhh if you work with books so if you rely on your book than actually skills are integrated, you will never stick with the one skill for too long because the book is devised as such but I think this is an effect of training, so I think I never had a phase in my life where I actually had to devise a lesson in detail and think about which skills I'm going to integrate

S1: mhm

S2: because we don't, there was a time when we did topic-based teaching

S1: yeah

S2: maybe that was danger because if you got engaged in a discussion and it went well then you kept on having that discussion for 30 minutes or what

S1: yeah

S2: but you always have things like routines, so you have a little vocabulary check, you have some kind of reading maybe because it's a starter or you have some kind of a grammar exercise because it sums up whatever you have been doing or you're revising a little bit, so I think for the language teaching there, you basically you don't fall into the trap of not changing method and not serving different skills

S1: okay, so kind of try to assign equal weight to each of the skills and how do you make sure that this really happens, like are you looking at, are you constantly taking notes which skill you performed

S2: no, no ähm I think there are teachers who are good at this who are good at monitoring what they are actually doing either in advance or after they have done it

S1: mhm

S2: ähm but I think what I am doing is I'm relying on my gut feeling

S1: mhm

S2: if I get bored then you can bet the kids are bored

S1: okay

S2: so as long as I keep moving and as long as I ähm consider the goal I want to reach, so I want the kid to learn about a specific topic or to ähm enlargen vocabulary in some respect or be able to use a structure to some degree and I always tackle this issue from different angles

S1: yeah

S2: so we have to see it once, we have to read it somewhere, we have to speak about it, we have to use it in speaking, we have to hear it somewhere

S1: so you always have kind of different perspectives

S2: yeah yeah and that serves the different skills automatically

S1: yeah okay

S2: so my revising loop, my revision loop basically works with different skills

S1: yeah, that's cool, okay, so and which of the four skills is then in your opinion the most difficult for you as a teacher and which one is the easiest?

S2: to teach now you mean

S1: yeah, to teach and to integrate into your lessons

S2: integrating into lessons, the most challenging mhm, ähm professionally speaking, speaking because that's what I'm focusing on at the moment, how do I teach speaking, how do I give kids opportunity to learn how to speak

S1: yeah

S2: ähm, what was the question again, which of the four skills is the most difficult to integrate ähm, well reading, feels phf like a waste of time often, more than writing interestingly enough, äh, I think it's because in reading see that children have extremely difficult äh different timing

S1: yeah

S2: so some are very fast and some are very slow and what I also feel is that I cannot improve their reading skills, what is it that I can do to make them read and understand better, I can give opportunities, I can have them read things, have them work on it but I can very hardly or it's very hard to provide help

S1: yeah because you see that they need longer, that they have yeah problems with reading but you don't really know what there problems are and go beyond these overall

S2: mhm yeah I would say for “Unterstufe” we do have, you acquire a diagnostic eye, so you can see this is probably because the kid is slow on the uptake in general or this is because he or she doesn’t have enough vocabulary to grasp the meaning, yeah, that’s what we can see mostly in “Unterstufe”, in “Oberstufe” I have the feeling it’s not clear for me

S1: yeah

S2: because they, you know, everybody works on their text and if we don’t make this explicit and if we don’t really dive into it and do one-to-one tutoring then I will not get that what the problem is and sometimes the kids themselves don’t know

S1: yeah

S2: cause how do you improve reading, I don’t know how to improve reading, you can just give examples and then share the, you know share the mistakes, and share the good versions and then try to get this solution into somebody’s brain but

S1: and make them aware of to pick strategies

S2: yeah that scanning, skimming thing you can train that a little bit but I think it’s very much linked with natural level of intelligence

S1: yeah

S2: much more than speaking because in speaking I can use some chunks, I can train them to always start the sentence with this and that will already give a good impression

S1: mhm

S2: once the flow starts

S1: yeah, and you can provide phrases and stuff like that, they can really

interruption

S1: and the easiest skill, what would you say is then speaking

S2: the easiest, mhm

interruption

S2: ähm my question again

S1: the easiest

S2: ahh, the easiest, ironically enough probably is grammar but is grammar is not a skill

S1: no, grammar is not a skill

S2: speaking, reading, listening, writing the easiest, well, the easiest to integrate for a teacher I think is speaking, speaking because it is kind of your job; yeah, I mean listening actually, sorry, my speaking would already be a listening comprehension, so that’s the most natural skill that we are integrating and also the books and material, they are so well equipped with all the listening

S1: yeah, ok so this directly leads to material

S2: yeah

S1: so because the Austrian curriculum states that there should be a balance between all the skills and ähm which of the skills or which role do course materials play in teaching the four skills in a balanced way?

S2: mmmm, well they are the basis of my teaching as a matter of fact, so mhm yeah I think it’s your personal choice, I know teachers who hate books

S1: yeah

S2: they would always fill in additional material and devise their own lesson plans and what not

but I actually think since I do have a book, since we paid for a book and I do need some general guideline anyway why should I not take the book, what I do in specific detail with every little section is up to me, so that's my teachers professionalism,

S1: yeah

S2: if they give me something as a reading I still have the choice how to use it, so I might jump off it as a reading but then I might want to use it as a super gap text for speaking like take out some skeleton and turn it into a monologue activity

S1: yeah but you actually think that the materials available are compatible with the Austrian curriculum? like that they provide really ähm a balance of

S2: ähm yeah I'm not an item writer and a book author so I can't be bothered with this question to be honest

S1: okay, yeah

S2: what I do is I trust the system, I go like somebody, some committee decided that this is approved, so let it be approved

S1: let I be yeah

S2: and we change books a lot, we have changed them a lot recently, the last, since, the last four five years

S1: so you see a development in the material

S2: yeah, yeah yeah, I do see a development but I have to say that the Austrian books, so the domestic editions do not convince me a hundred per cent, to my degree they focus too much on testing, which is nice, it's what we need too but what they lose out of sight a little bit is the very pff okay the very teaching, the very acquisition of language

S1: okay

S2: it is very much teaching to the test, yeah, you need to have this format for language in use and you need to have this speaking activity because you're aiming for thin and that

S1: yeah

S2: but the fun is lost a little bit methodically, so the methods are not so varied anymore, compared to international books, so I actually favor those

S1: yeah and in terms of the skills I also looked at not only listening, speaking, reading and writing but at all the sub-skills, like for example listening to a video-clip, an audio-file or for content, gist and reading and do you think that there are certain sub-skills which are not really covered by the course materials and should actually receive more attention because the students need those or have trouble with those skills?

S2: mhm

S1: for example, listening, there is I guess there is a lot of audio-files but not that much video-files in course materials

S2: mhm, well with the new books there are, let me think about, yeah, the Austrian books ähm they have sequences from some movies that fit the topic somewhere and have a lot of media studies

S1: okay

S2: material, whereas the international books that we have been using, they have actors staging some everyday situation, so they use video material as a prompt for another activity whereas the Austrian books tend to use video material for media studies

S1: yeah

S2: so what, that actually supports my love (*laughter*) for international books because I'm not interested in media studies, I think that's äh to some degree it's a waste of time, it's nice once twice or three times but not for every topic

S1: yeah, mhm

S2: ähm what does the book not cover, ähm maybe I'm not the right person to ask because I don't follow a book slavishly and that means on the other hand that I don't remember what's in there

S1: what's in there, yeah

S2: because I, I use different items the way I want to use them and the way I think they make sense

S1: no it's not that big of a problem

S2: so, no I couldn't really tell you, maybe reading aloud since I see it here

S1: mhm

S2: that lost a little bit, cause in the books it's never an issue, they never say read aloud, I think I started being a teacher when they said don't have people read aloud because it means they don't understand what they are reading

S1: yeah

S2: ähm but I still think it's a nice means of training pronunciation or you know something like staging, putting yourself on the stage and reading to ähh

S1: to

S2: a group of people, so it has other benefits

S1: yeah

S2: actually then I would put it in speaking though

S1: mhm, yeah it's kind of yeah because role play is also sometimes like scripted and you have those things you have to say but that rather speaking yeah

S2: mhm, definitely

S1: okay, so let's turn to the students a little bit, so which of the four skills is the most challenging for your students and why?

S2: which is the most challenging for a student, mhm, I couldn't say, I couldn't say because I think it really really depends on the student, I think there, if you are an oral type, an oral you know an auditive learner then listening is no challenge but if not then listening is extremely difficult because it's so fleeting

S1: yeah

S2: and the listening scenario is that we have of course also mean number one you don't see the person, so you don't have lip movement as a help as in real life, you cannot ask back and ähm we do have a lot of material with ähm dialect influence

S1: yeah

S2: which is good but for some people this is a proper challenge and it's hard to train because you don't really know where to start either you have these ears or you don't, so it takes a lot of effort, I think to improve your reading äh your listening skills

S1: yeah

S2: ähm and again, reading again, it's always the same, it's hard to train reading I think and very time consuming

S1: mhm okay, yeah I's also kind of, I mean listening is a skill that occurs constantly because if you have to listen to the teacher or others but reading is kind of, also the E8 Standards tests and all the other in Austria always we are always kind of a little bit bad in reading, it's kind of

S2: yeah, it's funny you're saying that because that's the experience we first had, we have students that are relatively good I think in their performance and then when we started doing international exams, what we noticed was that their reading skill were, äh were behind expectations

S1: yeah

S2: yeah and ähm the way we tried to explain it to ourselves is that we haven't been training it

S1: yeah because you really have to train these kind of activities, some people are really good in those and others are good readers but just don't know how to perform these matching, ticking etc. exercises I guess

S2: mhm that's right, it's just that the overall question then is that is this a reading exercise or is it actually a mechanical intelligence test

S1: yeah ok, another question is which skill do your students rather have to perform as part of their homework than in class, so which skill do you mostly assign as homework?

S2: yeah, the most common one is writing, still, also because that's so easy to count and easy to give feedback on

S1: mhm

S2: I rarely give reading pff yeah sometimes, I, in the eighth form when we towards the close of the, you know when we're doing the final sprint so to say, then I give them Bifie links and I say okay do half of the reading exercises but the problem is that I don't see if they've done it and I you know if they have questions to me then yes I can see that they've worked on it but in fact there is no way for me to check whether they've done their homework

S1: or not, yeah

S2: I give opportunities, I offer chances, I give links, I give information but I cannot really prove that this homework has been done

S1: okay

S2: that's why writing is so nice

S1: yeah because you have the sheet of paper in front of you and you always see that the student really did it

S2: yeah and what we have started too, which is relatively recent, of course, is having recordings

S1: yeah

S2: so kids as a homework record their monologues they are three, they are two minutes

S1: so they record themselves? oh that's cool

S2: speaking yeah, but then again, I have to trust them, ähm you always do that, they can also copy written homework and then it's no use actually doing it and then I find it particularly difficult that ähm I can't judge how prepared this was

S1: sure

S2: so I cannot really tell language performance apart because there is this one kid who is a natural, didn't put much effort in it and has a super product sent to me and then there is the other one that is weak spontaneously but prepared wonderfully and filled in I don't know how

many words with the help of dictionary, so the product is comparable but I still know that or I have to assume that the language skill behind this is very different

S1: yeah but I think it's a nice idea because the students can really also listen to themselves and yeah you realize things you never have, yeah

S2: mhm, they hate it, I can tell you that they hate it (*laughter*)

S1: I guess so (*laughter*)

S1: and it is really a lot of work, actually I also hate listening to myself (*laughter*)

S2: but the good thing is that with these recordings I get the chance to feedback on oral performance which did not happen before

S1: that's true, and you have the chance to re-listen to it

S2: yeah but I also have to be careful with that because if you start to re-listen to every students, that's endless work, this is puh (*laughter*)

S1: of course, so that's it for the students and teaching of the skills and now my final question, kind of, did you experience a major change of importance of the four skills throughout your time as a teacher and how do you see the future of the four skills, do you believe that there is one skill which will kind of gain importance or one which will lose importance or do you think that this focus on equality will remain?

S2: mhm I think nothing much will change anymore, what we have experienced in the last ten or so years in the course of all those "Schulversuche" and so on, first that listening has become more important cause the formats changed, you know away from this summary type to proper listening comprehension, that was the first change and that know with the new Matura format in orals that spontaneous speech is important, so speaking is an extremely important skill but I don't think that there will be any major difference to this or any major new development

S1: yeah, because now I think it's maybe the best because you really have all skills and not only one or two like for example during grammar-translation or ...

S2: yeah mhm, I guess speaking is the most important

S1: yeah, that's it actually, is there anything you would like to add

S2: the only point maybe is that I don't know if you say that in English, all roads lead to Rome, you don't say that in English, ähm so maybe teaching will change but ähm the importance of the four skills will not change, that's my idea yeah

S1: yeah that's a good point because there has been a lot of development concerning the teaching approaches but there have always been the four skills in some way

S2: yeah and maybe the major factor is technology, so whatever means you have that will change your teaching

S1: yeah because back I don't know in the 80s or 90s you didn't have that access to video clips on Youtube, students can listen and watch videos for years

S2: and we didn't have video materials with books for example and we watched one movie a year, you had to buy it privately

S1: and you didn't have computers in classes or beamers, you had to get this one TV in school and have yeah

S2: yeah that maybe that's the major influence

S1: yes, good point, ok

S2: interesting anyway

S1: thank you

S2: thank you, my pleasure

INTERVIEW 3

S1: Okay, first of all I would like you to introduce yourself and answer the questions for how long have you been teaching, what is your second subject and in which schools have you been teaching so far?

S2: okay, so my name is [...] and I'm a teacher of English and of French and then a couple of school autonomous subjects which äh have names like "International Communication and Business" or "International Business and Tourism", so basically these are more or less CLIL courses, Content and Language Integrated learning courses where students in a three year curriculum are prepared for independent desk research and a project paper they need to do within the framework of leaving certificate, so this is in vocational schools like the "Fachbereichs" what is it called the "Vorwissenschaftliche Arbeit" in AHS, we have got a similar equivalent in the vocational schools which is called "Diplomarbeit" and it is in these school autonomous subjects either "Communication in Business" or "International Business and Tourism" where in a three years course in the first year students sort of learn how to sketch out in the target language the training and the Austrian school system and they find their way in international businesses and so on in the second year they learn about business ethics and the European Union and so on and the last year the third year is one where they really work individually on an area of their choice, they work in teams and they write a paper and they also have to take this as an oral exam at their school leaving certificate

S1: okay

S2: their oral finals, so just to explain what it is, I hardly teach French anymore and most of the time I teach both English and then these two CLIL courses which are pretty much similar and whose aim it is basically in English to prepare students to sort of do a school leaving certificate paper

S1: okay, and which schools have you been to already?

S2: I actually applied for my induction here at this school, when it was still at a different location, in the 21st district at the [...] and I've been remaining loyal to the same educational institution which of course has got its advantages and also its disadvantages I must say, I've never experienced another, another school

S1: yeah, but I understand you because I really like to come here

S2: it's definitely no coincidence that I'm still here

S1: okay, so let's turn to the four language skills, ähm, how much weight would you like to assign to each of the four skills in your language lessons and how do you succeed in it and is there a difference in turns of weight an time you would like to assign to each of the four skills?

S2: mhm, ähm I'd say, but that also has to do with the context of the vocational school, I'd sort of say the one that I give most to is speaking, äh so the spoken production one and here spoken production an spoken interaction both but this is what I sort of see as, if you ask me

S1: of course

S2: whether then I do it in the classroom is a different matter of course, ähm this is the one that I sort of see as the top priority because all of our students regardless of which kind of educational package they take, they all have got to take a spoken exam at the end of their curriculum

S1: okay

S2: äh in English in one form or the other, this is also the reason why I talked about this CLIL course before

S1: yeah

S2: so this is sort of and then also we know from this kind of proximity from the vocational school to the real world, that the speaking skill, presenting yourself, presenting a project, giving a powerful presentation, defending your views powerfully, that this is sort of the most prominent thing

S1: yeah

S2: yeah, so I'd say that this is the one that comes top, do I have to say to which percentage as well or

S1: would be nice but

S2: yeah, ähm, mhm, don't know maybe it takes really maybe 50 per cent of all, yeah then I'd say the written production, yeah because many of them have to take the "Klausur" they have got to take the and because writing is, there are sort of real-life challenges later on they need to apply at the "Fachhochschule" in a letter of application, they sort of need to have, ähm, also to some extent some academic writing skills in order to succeed later on for post-secondary education in English

S1: of course

S2: even if they don't study English they sort of come across that, ähm, most abstracts nowadays have to be written in English, ähm, well I'd say maybe this is another 20 or 25 per cent and the other 25, so 12.5 each would be the listening and the reading

S1: reading, yeah

S2: that, having said this, it's slightly changing I think and this is where my kind of spontaneous, ähm, assigning so much and so much importance to each of the skills is quite at loggerheads with the current trend in the educational landscape as the receptive skills are given much more prominence now with the Matura

S1: yeah

S2: with the standardized Matura, here it's 50 per cent in AHS and it's even 66 per cent in BHS

S1: oh wow

S2: in the "Schulversuch" currently, it is one third is writing, and one third is listening, and one third is reading for the overall mark, so I quite, I admit that my own practice of what I've been doing over the past almost twenty years or 16 years is a bit at loggerheads with the new trend, so

S1: mhm

S2: mhm, it's quite likely that I'm maybe will, have to give more time, and more prominence, more focus to the receptive skills in the future

S1: mhm

S2: ähm, having said that, maybe however, this is something that the students can develop autonomously more easily than the productive skills anyway

S1: of course, because they need someone to talk to and

S2: and also they are surrounded by English, they have many possibilities to listen English, to listen to English music, to watch American movies, to read books in English, so this kind of extensive reading thing is something that needs to be done out of school anyway, so maybe it's fair enough after all that most prominence is given to the productive skills

S1: yeah

S2: and yeah, but by and large I think if you ask me this is something in vocational schools that the spoken production is given more prominence than in Ahs where I'd say maybe the writing component is more prominent than in vocational schools

S1: okay

S2: this is maybe just the impression I

S1: okay so it's definitely that you don't assign equal attention to each of the skills

S2: no, no

S1: yeah and which of the four skills is in your opinion the most difficult to integrate into your lessons and which one is kind of the easiest?

S2: ähm, well the most time consuming one is writing

S1: mhm

S2: as it takes time and this is also the reason why in the 602 course at the department we sort of have ways for collaborative writing and in-class writing, and support of the teacher in the writing process

S1: mhm

S2: but I'd say this is the most time consuming

S1: mhm is it also because the students are so different in their writing and some need a lot of time

S2: also this

S1: and some yeah

S2: because there is much more, this kind of heterogeneity, sort of much more marked in the, you see it much more in writing than in speaking, yeah

S1: mhm

S2: it's also I can say from my own professional experience that in grading, sort of the spoken performances are much much closer in terms of the quality of the output

S1: yeah

S2: and the writing there you get sort of the kind of differences

S1: yeah

S2: also receptive skill are much much closer

S1: yeah I guess so

S2: so you get 60 items of a listening or of a reading test and will range, so the top score is maybe 28 the best one and the worst is maybe 22 or 20 but it's really in writing that you get the largest range of performances

S1: and do you think then that speaking is the easiest skill to integrate or is it the receptive skills?

S2: ähm, depend also on what you see as classroom work, if you define classroom work more broadly into a supported learning environment where students also read independently on the learning platform, where they sort of listen to the documents on the learning platform, then the listening and reading is easy to integrate

S1: mhm

S2: the speaking component is the one that really requires most of physical presence

S1: yeah, of course

S2: and then again with the, it's ever so easy nowadays, with the smartphone, everyone can record a few megabytes, audio-files can be uploaded to a platform but, still it is still spoken production, so maybe the spoken interaction one because you have to have real-life, real-time chat, spoken chat which sort of would have to have, I don't know, I'm not so much into

the technical side of it, have students work on Skype with each other and so on, but then that's maybe the one that sort of really requires the classroom "Präsenzunterricht" most

S1: yeah and because in listening and reading there is so much material

S2: yes, yes you can easily sort of bound that out into the

S1: and I actually also counted listening to the teacher

S2: yeah

S1: and therefore they listen kind of constantly

S2: yeah

S1: mhm, okay and which of the four language skills is the most challenging for you personally as a teacher, so is it speaking because you really need to monitor the students all the time because

S2: no, I find writing is the hardest to see progress

S1: mhm

S2: mhm, because there it is also what this kind of phenomenon of, what is it called, the fossilization, that sort of, and I see that particularly with English that they are sort of at the level at the B1 level after 4 5 years of English and then it's very hard to get them towards a B2 level or even higher, and that's sort of frustrating for learner when they are at the age of 17 and 18 and they really try to get more complex ideas and concept onto black and white onto paper and it's something that is very very time-consuming and you need to put up with quite a large amount of frustration because you get a lot of feedback as a learner and it's very hard to get the collocations right, and then English is I always keep telling, it's deceptively what it's deceptively complex I call it, or deceptively simple, I don't know, well what I want to say is, it looks easy on the surface because English is very economical and keep it short and simple but it's very hard for learners to get to that

S1: yeah

S2: especially with a German-speaking background, because in German we are sort of have very kind of long chains of sub-clauses and so on and participle groups and so on

S1: yeah, I it really, I experience still because I also love to write extremely long sentences

S2: yeah exactly, and this is what I find very hard with students, and there are very very few students who actually achieve this kind of economical style in English

S1: yeah, and I mean they all try but the you get negative feedback kind of, it's really frustrating

S2: mhm, mhm

S1: okay and do you have like one skill which you mostly assign as homework?

S2: it used to be mostly writing, mhm, and actually since I started to teach the 602 course with Hedge sort of saying it's relegated to the private sphere and then this sort of the unsupportive context of students not having the teacher or anyone to help them and the sort of this gap between the kind of academically weaker and academically, those better, it actually widens through this practice, this was a real eye-opener for me and since then I've been trying to integrate some of the collaborative writing into the classroom and to relegate more of the speaking into the homework sector as well, but still I'd say the vast majority of homework is still based on reading and on writing

S1: okay

S2: and it's the listening and the speaking which is more in-class activities

S1: okay, perfect, and with regard to course materials, ähm, do you or which role do they play in teaching the four skills in a balanced way?

S2: the course material, the books, the textbooks and so on, mhm, the textbooks provide mostly reading material I'd say

S1: mhm

S2: then listening material but that's already much less than reading material

S1: mhm

S2: then maybe some writing tasks and then, ähm, many text books also in the 602 course in this of course book analysis, when you take a look at some course books, the kind of, I always get that in the Portfolio in the 602 Portfolio, and it's true that much of the speaking activities are not real speaking activities, it's sort of "talk about" or that it's sort of a grammar drill which is just wrapped in in a speaking activity

S1: yeah

S2: but one where, a role card, where you've really got a context, that's really one thing that is ähm

S1: missing

S2: that is missing in the course books

S1: okay, so is there a kind of other sub-skill which is like not covered or and should receive more attention, and is it then speaking, like interactional

S2: yeah spoken, the interactional speaking, I think this is sort of something that is really missing and when there is some kind of interaction, if there is some jigsaw, it's very often more about grammar and about form and yeah this is sort of what is missing and then as far as writing goes very few course books take a process approach to writing it is very often a product approach because it needs to be very economical, this is you draft a letter of complaint, now you

S1: write it

S2: now you write it, so there is very little in terms of finding out the moves yourself and this product genre approach is kind of prevailing and the process approach is something that's ähm yeah only very few course books offer

S1: okay, but how do you see the development of the course books because there has been a lot of change in our system and do you see that the course books are really developing and that they are trying to be compatible with the Austrian curriculum?

S2: yes so it's, maybe less with the curriculum but rather with the kind of test formats of the bifie test formats because yeah again it's ähm but I guess it's in five, the next generation of books is going to be better but now it's sort of, when you take a look at course books, whatever input the students get it's always in some way or other it has got the task design of the reading or the listening formats of bifie and which of course is not necessarily the best way to teach skills but rather to test them

S1: yeah teaching to the test

S2: teaching to the test, this is sort of what I see and there are now books like for instance *Headway* which in terms of methodology is absolutely fine but in terms of the testing formats it's not and I think it's going to fall in absolute disfavor now as it does not integrate this test formats even though from point of view of methodology it's a very good book, so I sort of see the trend at the moment, it's the hype, so how do I sort of teach the close and open-close and how do I teach the multiple choice and so on and less how do I develop the skills and the sub-skills

S1: so there is development but it still needs time and it really depends on the book you use

S2: it really depends on the book yeah

S1: okay, now I want to turn just quickly to the students and my question would be which of the four skills do you think is the most challenging for your students?

S2: the writing

S1: mhm and just because they really need time to develop competence

S2: yeah and it's maybe also a generational time because we live in, I think in an oral or spoken era

S1: yeah

S2: yeah and to get the meaning across is what is most important and also in terms of, if you look at the kind of development of language teaching over the last 30, 40 years also this is one of the merits of the communicative language teaching approach and so on but sort of the writing is sort of the one which also requires patience and also maturity or whatever you call it and I feel this is the hardest

S1: yeah and I also guess it is a challenge to get across one's ideas in a straightforward way and coherence, cohesion

S2: absolutely

S1: how to structure a text

S2: absolutely and I'd sort of say because we also prepare the students for the international certificate, for the Cambridge certificate, in the vocational context it's the business certificate, the C1 level, and when we sort of see how they score, it's in speaking that they score best, and in reading that they score best, and the biggest challenge for many of them is writing

S1: writing yeah, it's interesting that they are so good in reading because actually with all the other tests in Austria reading is kind of always a weak skill

S2: yeah, reading is maybe the second most difficult one, it's maybe rather the speaking and the listening and then comes reading and then comes writing, yes I agree reading is not so, it's definitely more challenging for them to do the reading than the listening

S1: mhm

S2: which is also a generational thing or maybe because we as teachers are sort of academic and we wrote so much and read so much that we would sort of my generation, the generation of teachers of 40 and above would say of course listening is much harder than reading while with our students, our target group it's often the contrary

S1: yeah because now with the technology

S2: absolutely

S1: and the video-clips and all the TV series

S2: absolutely

S1: yeah interesting, we almost come to an end, now I just want to quickly talk about the past, present and future and my question is did you experience a change of importance of the four skills in the time of your teaching and how do you see the future of the four language skill, do you believe that there is one skill which really will gain importance or will it remain the same more or less?

S2: mhm, I think this depends very much on the educational context in which you are so as I was saying in a vocational context it seems sort of, clear to me that the speaking, it's normal that it takes not a back seat but a front seat as it were, ähm, maybe as I was already saying that over the past five years or so the receptive skills have gained more importance in what we do in teaching as they are sort of tested more prominently and are really skills in their own sense and are no longer just providing input material for productive skills, ähm that's definitely one of the things that did change, has changed over the last years, I used to sort of use reading and listening material basically as input for productive skills

S1: yeah

S2: also at written exams and so on and now because we work towards a school leaving certificate that is standardized really reading and listening are sort of granted much more importance and they are really skills in their own right

S1: yeah

S2: and the logical consequence of course is that writing now takes sort of a back seat, sort of, in more concrete terms, it used to be in a three hours test, it used to be three hours of writing minus twenty minutes to read and now it is the three hours test, one hour and 15 minutes reading and listening and just one hour and three quarters of an hour writing

S1: yeah it really changed because I had my test without reading

S2: without reading yeah

S1: so there was no reading, maybe 15 minutes listening but the rest was only writing

S2: yeah and that was much more standardized in AHS than it was in BHS

S1: mhm

S2: and in BHS we did not have any guidelines for listening altogether, sort of didn't even had it properly, which then this reform makes a sense, I think it is more learner focused more and it is more focused on the target group and it's just fair enough that you assess and grade the performance, that you test proficiency more holistically and not just based on the productive skills

S1: yeah that's good because it really fits the students kind of because some are better in listening and reading and others in writing

S2: yeah

S1: and during your school time did you already receive training in the four skills or was it really kind of grammar focused or

S2: no it was, when I started my teacher education at the beginning of the 1990s at university you talked about the active and the passive skills and so there was no distinction back then even though the Common European Framework was around but nobody talked about it actually, so there was no distinction is speaking for example between interaction and production and it was largely seen also the sub-skills was kind of, it was just either passive, you listened and understood you read and understood

S1: yeah

S2: yeah sort of, but by and large I think the receptive skills have definitely been gaining more importance

S1: okay

S2: and also in getting attention in language development

S1: so you believe that in the future they will even get more attention

S2: yeah, yes I think that with a new generation of teachers who are now trained, who are now in pre-service training that that is going to change and also the way that the writing is taught that it is not simply very much it is, who is it, it is Harmer who distinguishes between writing for writing and writing for learning

S1: for learning yeah

S2: and I think this writing for writing, sort of, there is more awareness that we need to teach writing for the sake of writing and not for the sake of learning

S1: okay, yeah

S2: sort of because when I remember my own writing skills, it was always write a summary, write a summary, so that was not about any writing for writing skills but it was just summarize what you heard, summarize what you read

S1: yeah, we always had to write summaries, summarize what you listened to, summarize what you read

S2: exactly, so no context, no audience awareness and that of course with a new generation of pedagogues, with a new generation of teachers being trained, that sort of is definitely to, going to have an impact on classroom work because maybe the generation of teachers who are now being trained still replicate what they went through themselves

S1: yeah

S2: but they develop further, so the next generation of teachers is already going to replicate something else

S1: yeah, that's good, okay that's it from my part is there anything you would like to add

S2: no, no it's just that I sort of that I find that really useful what you're doing here, this kind of research, so great

S1: thank you

SUMMARY IN GERMAN | ZUSAMMENFASSUNG AUF DEUTSCH

Die vier Fertigkeitsbereiche Hören, Sprechen, Lesen und Schreiben sind ein zentraler Bestandteil des Fremdsprachenunterrichts, da man eine Sprache ohne Kompetenz in diesen vier Bereichen nicht in ihrer Vollkommenheit beherrschen kann. Das Lehren und Lernen dieser Fertigkeitsbereiche ist sehr vielschichtig und erfordert Zeit und Ausdauer. Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit beschäftigt sich dahingehend mit den vier Sprachfertigkeiten im österreichischen Schulwesen und erforscht welche Aufmerksamkeit diesen im Englischunterricht der Oberstufe zukommt.

Der theoretische Teil dieser Arbeit beginnt zunächst mit einer Beschreibung der einflussreichsten Lehrmethoden und versucht im Zuge dessen auch den Standpunkt der vier Fertigkeiten in jeder dieser Unterrichtsmethoden darzulegen. Um einen besseren Überblick über die Entwicklung der Fähigkeiten zu erhalten, wird danach ein kurzer Blick auf die geschichtliche Entwicklung dieser geworfen.

Im Anschluss daran werden die einzelnen Fertigkeiten im Detail betrachtet, wobei neben den unterliegenden Prozessen und den nötigen Kenntnissen, auch eine Beschreibung der den vier Skills untergeordneten Fertigkeiten geboten wird.

In Bezugnahme auf das Lehren und Lernen der vier Grundkompetenzen welches im Mittelpunkt dieser Diplomarbeit steht, wird nach den Darlegungen zur Entwicklung und den Komponenten der einzelnen Skills, auf den aktuellen Österreichischen Fremdsprachenlehrplan, welcher eine Ausgewogenheit der vier Fertigkeitsbereiche vorschreibt, eingegangen. Ob und inwiefern die vier Fertigkeiten Hören, Sprechen, Lesen und Schreiben tatsächlich im Fremdsprachenunterricht vorkommen, ist die daraus resultierende die zentrale Forschungsfrage dieser Diplomarbeit welche im empirischen Teil beantwortet wird.

Der empirische Teil der Arbeit präsentiert die Methoden und die Ergebnisse der Forschung zur Verteilung der vier Skills im Englischstunden an österreichischen Schulen. Um Ergebnisse zu generieren, wurde der Unterricht von 5 verschiedenen LehrerInnen an drei verschiedenen Schulen in Wien beobachtet. Dies geschah mit der Hilfe eines aus 39 Kategorien bestehenden Beobachtungsbogens, der zuvor gestaltet und getestet wurde. Außerdem wurde mit drei der beobachteten, zufällig

ausgewählten LehrerInnen, ein leitfadengestütztes Interview durchgeführt, um einen weiteren Einblick in die Lehre und das Lernen der vier Fertigkeiten zu bekommen.

Die Ergebnisse der Unterrichtsbeobachtungen zeigen, dass die Fertigkeiten Hören und Sprechen mehr als zwei Drittel der Unterrichtszeit einnehmen. Folglich kann den Bereichen Lesen und Schreiben, welche 15% beziehungsweise 24% der Unterrichtszeit einnehmen, nur eine untergeordnete Rolle zugeschrieben werden.

Dieses Ergebnis wird auch von den InterviewpartnerInnen bekräftigt, welche allesamt übereinstimmen, dass Hören und Sprechen, jene zwei Fertigkeiten sind, welchen im Unterricht die meiste Aufmerksamkeit zukommt. Dies resultiert daraus, dass das Training der Sprachkompetenz die Anwesenheit des/der Lehrers/Lehrerin dringender erfordert als jenes der Lese- und Schreibkompetenz. Außerdem sind Lesen und Schreiben jene Fertigkeiten, deren Training am zeitaufwendigsten ist, was schließlich dazu führt, dass diese meist in den Bereich des Selbststudiums (Hausübung) ausgelagert werden.

Zusammenfassend lässt sich feststellen, dass FremdsprachenlehrerInnen eine Ausgewogenheit der vier Fertigkeiten im Unterricht anstreben und versuchen ihren SchülerInnen die Möglichkeit zu geben allen Kompetenzbereichen gleichermaßen zu trainieren. Aufgrund der zeitlichen Ressourcen ist es jedoch meist nicht möglich jedem Skill gleich viel Zeit zu schenken, sodass SchülerInnen sich manche Fertigkeiten auch im Selbststudium üben und weiterentwickeln müssen.

CURRICULUM VITAE

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Ausbildung

- Oktober 2010 – Mai 2015 **Lehramt Spanisch und Englisch**
Universität Wien
Universitätsring 1
1010 Wien
- Oktober 2009 – Juni 2010 **Bachelor Romanistik Spanisch**
Universität Wien
Universitätsring 1
1010 Wien
- September 2013 – Februar 2014 **Auslandssemester im Rahmen des Lehramtsstudiums an der Universität Wien**
Universidad de Salamanca, Spanien
- September 2001 – Juli 2009 **Bundesgymnasium und Bundesrealgymnasium Freistadt, Oberösterreich**
Matura (Notendurchschnitt 8. Klasse 1,04)
Schwerpunkte: Englisch, Spanisch, Mathematik, Deutsch und Latein
Vertiefung in: Musik und Sportbiologie

Berufserfahrung

- Juli 2014 – April 2015 **Europäische Gesellschaft für Radiologie**
Neutorgasse 9
1010 Wien
- Juli 2012
August 2010 **Stimmenfestival Freistadt**
Projektassistent bei einem einwöchigen Chorfestival
- Festivalzeitung „Chorwurm“
 - Assistenz der organisatorischen Leitung
 - Betreuung der Chöre und FestivalteilnehmerInnen
- Juli 2012 **Kinderfreunde Wien**
Projektassistentin Sommerakademie der Kinderfreunde Wien
- Kinderbetreuung und Unterstützung der KursleiterInnen
 - organisatorische Leitung vor Ort
- Juli 2011 – September 2011 **Au Pair**
3-monatiger Auslandsaufenthalt in den USA
Beaufsichtigung von 3 Kindern zwischen 4 und 7 Jahren

Engagement

- Wintersemester 2014/2015 **Universität Wien**
Mitarbeit am neuen Curriculum Master of Education in English
- September 2011 – **Universität Wien**
Mitarbeiterin Peer-Mentoring

Jänner 2012

- Unterstützung von Erstsemestrigen beim Studieneinstieg
- Organisation von regelmäßigen Aktivitäten für StudienbeginnerInnen

September 2005 –
Juli 2009

Schulradio „Radius 106,6“

Mitarbeit am Schulprojekt „Schule macht Radio“ – Moderation von Radiosendungen, sowie Mitarbeit in der Redaktion und bei Veranstaltungen

Besondere Kenntnisse

Computerkenntnisse:

- fundierte Kenntnisse in Microsoft Word, Power Point, Excel und Outlook

Sprachkenntnisse:

- Deutsch Muttersprache
- Englisch fließend in Wort und Schrift (C2)
- Spanisch fließend in Wort und Schrift (C1)
- Niederländisch Basiskenntnisse
- Latein

Sonstiges:

- Führerschein B

Hobbies:

- Klarinette
- Chor
- Reisen
- Sport