MIND MAPPING AND BRAINSTORMING AS METHODS OF TEACHING BUSINESS CONCEPTS IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract: This paper aims at presenting some alternative methods of teaching Business English stressing the fact that freedom, creativity, confidence walk hand in hand and are valuable tools in teaching. Contrary to the traditional approach, sharing ideas when teaching is to follow the brain’s power of visualization and association, thus improving creative thinking and building a new pattern of learning: student-oriented learning process. Mind mapping and brainstorming are two techniques that use the concept of radiant thinking – thoughts flood out from a single central idea; the main concept to be debated in the centre and then it is linked via lines and arrows to other idea and concepts, which, in turn are connected to other related ideas. Mind mapping and brainstorming have a wide range of usage: from reading books and figuring out main ideas and concepts, to business meetings, planning compositions, sorting out family problems, expanding a topic to be studied.

Keywords: Business English, brainstorming, mind mapping, teaching/learning techniques

INTRODUCTION

Teaching business English as a foreign language to Economics students can be a rather challenging task: sometimes language teachers are in the position of teaching concepts that students may have encountered previously, lucky situation, and then, it is a little bit easier as you handle something already understood in the mother tongue; there are unfortunate situations, though, when language teachers have to speak about concepts that are completely unknown to the students as they may not have acquired them in their mother tongue (due to some misfortunate faults in the curricula).

The question is: how is it possible to handle difficult situations of introducing new ideas, words, concepts, or to reinforce the knowledge and translate it in a foreign language. Mind mapping and brainstorming could be a viable solution to both developing and getting started with a topic.

From early childhood each of us has strived to create easy ways to learn, to conceive methods able to organize to outline information in our studies, and this is just because images are a universal language, handy and helpful, memory techniques and our own systems of visuals empower our learning capacity. It is a lot simpler to connect words and pictures so as to convey ideas, thoughts. Once we grow older and wiser, there are also alternatives to outlining and organizing ideas: mind- and concept-mapping.

Foreign languages are the ideal subject area for the use of memory techniques as teaching languages is particularly centred on interactive, student-centred methods. Therefore brainstorming and mind mapping, role-play seems to be beneficial to the Business English learning process. Learning vocabulary, expanding knowledge of different abstract concepts, is often a matter of associating a meaningless collection of
syllables with a word in your own language, or different words to a certain concept. Visual methods are a step forward as compared to the traditional repetition techniques of learning new items of vocabulary, when saying the word in their own language and the foreign language time and time again were the solution.

When it comes to the research methods, we have used for this paper, they can be framed within the area of fundamental research whose main aim is, as Miller (1991) noticed, to describe the existing realities, and not to change them. In writing our paper, we have taken into consideration a series of general essential considerations presented above and we have set in mind to reach and develop the following stages:
1) the choosing of the research subject and the establishing of the significance of the approached issues;
2) the research by using the international and national specialty literature;
3) the formulation of the working questions which will be tested and the consideration of possible errors such as the clear defining of the concepts used and of the reference theoretical framework used;
4) the defining of the methodology and data collecting techniques;
5) data analysis and the validation or rejection of the hypotheses worked out;
6) the interpretation of results.

The description of the main characteristics of our fundamental research regarding qualities, benefits and strong points of mind mapping and brainstorming as teaching methods for Business English, refers to:

a) the nature of the problem—the presentation of the teaching approaches centred on the student as compared to the traditional, former methods of rendering knowledge;
b) the purpose of the research – the exploration of the necessity to employ fresh, creative, sometimes unconventional methods when teaching foreign languages and the understanding of the most efficient ways to communicate them;
c) the basic theory— the selection of the theory guiding the hypotheses and strengthening the concepts used, after the examination;
d) specific techniques— the formulation of research questions, the testing of the hypotheses, the validation or rejection of the hypotheses.

1. THE STUDENT-CENTRED APPROACH AND ACTIVITIES TO LEARNING AND TEACHING

One of the main concerns of the educational system is how to create and implement an environment that places the student’s experience in the very centre. This refers not to asking the student read the homework, or just engaging the student in pair or group work activities. Student-centred activities are the core of the educational process; it is the equivalent of effective education. The best way to define the concept is by comparison with the opposite concept of teacher-centred approach. In the communicative, student-centred approach, the focus shifts from the teacher away to the students. According to specialists, following the teacher-centred approach [1] teachers used to serve as the key participants in the lesson, controlling student’s access to information, spreading out knowledge towards students who are empty recipients. The student’s previous experience and knowledge is irrelevant and of no use; the assessment is the traditional exam, where the student has to demonstrate that s/he has accumulated a certain amount of information. In terms of learning it can be translated by mainly memorisation of facts, figures, and ideas; in terms of teaching it means passing the organised information to passive students organised in groups, sitting in rows. In the ‘student-centred’ approach, it is not anymore the teacher controlling everything (and the teacher being controlled by a book) and the students speak after the teacher and the book. Students are no longer empty recipients, how is taught is far more important than what is being taught. Learning becomes an interactive, dynamic experience, an exchange of ideas, facts, connection between teacher and student and student — student as well. Students are permanently encouraged to practice all the skills: listening, speaking, writing, reading; the assessment means a journey to a result, the means and way is far more relevant than the result itself. Learning means encouraging thinking and sharing experiences, while teaching is co-working shoulder to shoulder with students, facilitating students’ access to information and knowledge. To conclude, we have to point out that the two approaches do not exclude each other. They should work together. Student centred teaching/learning engages the student, however, it does not mean that the teacher comes to class, sets the students a task, and arranges the groups and goes away to have a cup of tea. The teacher’s role here is to help and to monitor and take notes for remedial exercises as required. Brainstorming and mind mapping, as communicative approaches in teaching are very participative, since all students can take part in the journey.
of knowledge. Mind-mapping is the natural process that the brain uses to file information generated by brainstorming, also a natural process, through a series of connections between images and experiences. These connections between ideas are also a natural form of logic and reasoning, used by the brain to interpret areas of knowledge.

2. MIND MAPPING

As dictionaries explain, a mind map (or flow charting as it was called in the 70s) is “a graphical technique for visualizing connections between several ideas or pieces of information” [2] “a diagram used to visually outline information” [3], “a way of making notes that is intuitive and highly personal” [4]. Each idea is set to the paper or blackboard and then lines and curves connect it to its more or less important ideas, creating networks of relationships.

Technically, a mind map - also called: spider diagram, ‘spider gram’, web, mind web, webbing - is created around a single word or concept placed centrally in a box/bubble, to which connected ideas, words and concepts are added gradually. Mind maps can be drawn by hand, at the beginning of a class or as notes during a lecture or meeting, or as higher quality pictures when more time is available.

According to Mayer, individuals can process additional information, if it is presented additionally in two forms (auditory and pictorially and information can be represented in the brain in either the verbal or visual code. Churchill considers “different representations are more efficient when dealing with different tasks of a reasoning task”. [5, pg. 341-342]. The Cognitive Load Theory [6] implies that there is a limited space of working memory to process information, thus mind mapping helps reducing the ‘memory overflow’ and enables students’ potential to develop thinking and reasoning skills, helping them to alter their perceptions based on other students’ points of view which is, in the end, learning.

Students see on the map what has been thought before and build on that, then students decide on the group names of ideas gathered on the board, while the teacher has nothing to say, being involved in monitoring language only.

The phrase ‘mind map’ itself is a trademark of Buzan’s company for the specific use for self-improvement educational courses as it was first popularized by the British psychology author Tony Buzan when BBC TV ran a series hosted by Buzan called Use Your Head. Buzan says the idea was inspired by Alfred Korzybski’s theory of general semantics [7] which he had used and popularized in science fiction novels. Buzan claimed that he chose to promote the exclusive use of mind mapping over other forms of note making when developing ideas arguing that while “traditional” approaches made readers scan left to right and top to bottom, readers actually tended to scan the entire page in a non-linear manner.

Thanks to his assiduous and tireless efforts to let people know more about the topic, more and more people use and benefit from the technique throughout the world (even though some consider it a hard sell for the ‘Buzan’ products, only part of his marketing strategy).

2.1. WHAT IS THE USE OF MIND MAPS?

Pressley, VanEtten, Yokoi, Freebern, and VanMeter [8, 347-367] considered that learners were a lot more effective and learnt when focusing on the content of learning rather than worrying over any one particular form of note taking. On the other hand, Farrand, Hussain, and Hennessy suggested that it was rather difficult for students to operate with this new learning technique; yet, they concluded the study considering that “mind maps provide an effective study technique when applied to written material. However before mind maps are generally adopted as a study technique, consideration has to be given towards ways of improving motivation amongst users.” [9, 426-431]

Some undeniable advantages of mind mapping are: it improves confidence in learning abilities and making them receptive to learning; ideas are better organized, associations are visual; new ideas can easier expand around the central idea by adding new topics and sub-branches; connections between ideas and concepts are a lot handier in a visual arrangement; it is easier when seeing the whole picture; mind maps are easy to review and regular review reinforces memory and creative thinking; communication is effective, clear concise and alive; the brainstorming of ideas and thoughts are appropriately judged.
Although brainstorming has been well established in business, management and management training for years, it can be very effective in teaching foreign languages as well. Any first idea seen on the board triggers another idea, and it has a motivating effect, as students will try harder. The teacher does not interfere; he/she only monitors language not ideas.

This is a highly motivating learning activity and ideally results in the students forgetting they are speaking English whilst doing their project. Students begin using English as a tool for communication and interact student-student-teacher. Students do not experience English as being a topic to be learnt for a grade, they learn to feel free, asking questions without being ashamed for not knowing, they actually understand there is only one good answer.

A mind map is considered a great way to brainstorm and generate more ideas. It helps create a number of small ideas from one big idea, see how different ideas could be connected together and create a plan of action.

3. BRAINSTORMING

Brainstorming as teaching/learning technique brings along creativity practice and more interactive lessons; it is a technique for recalling what is already known about a topic, “a conference technique of solving specific problems, amassing information, stimulating creative thinking, developing new ideas, etc., by unrestrained and spontaneous participation in discussion” [10, pg 253].

Sometimes students may be reluctant either because they are not familiar with the method, or just because they are reserved by nature, other times just being too stressed to provide the “right answer”. It is the random generation of ideas based around a topic” a group problem-solving technique in which members make efforts to find a conclusion for a certain problem [11]; the ideas are generated spontaneously, no ordering is required. It encourages learners to think creatively, without restraints, to reinforce the already acquired knowledge and to stimulate the enlargement of knowledge. The purpose of the technique is to break from the traditional way of thinking when learning, to encourage creativity and this can be achieved only when there are no restrictions, criticism and judging. The result should be a very creative, new solution to problems, a generation of original, relaxed and informal ideas.

The term started to be used in 1953 after the publication of spread Alex Osborn’s book Applied Imagination, where Osborn supported the idea that brainstorming was more effective than individuals working alone in generating ideas [12]. When ideas are set down visually, connections can be made and thus develop greater understanding of information. It is a good way to begin planning for an assignment, essay, research topic or oral presentation.

3.1. WHY BRAINSTORMING?

Brainstorming is the name given to a number of techniques used for generating and gathering ideas. Since 1950s when it was established as techniques, brainstorming has proved one of the most usual methods used in meetings in order to generate ideas. Basically it is about the students who generate ideas which may be collected, for example, on the blackboard. During the collecting process, all ideas suggested are jotted down and it is only after the brainstorming is finished that ideas are discussed, grouped or eliminated. Brainstorming can encourage students to speak out and share ideas. It also gives the teacher an immediate impression of how much the students already know about something.

Here are some of the benefits of using brainstorming: it visualises thought; it helps build up confidence and consolidate student-student as well as student-teacher collaboration; it increases the whole world of ideas explored and connected to the topic, especially before reading, writing or listening activities; it is great for team building and group work practice; it helps students see the results of their efforts and thus English becomes tangible, comprehensible and meaningful to them.

3.2. HOW TO BRAINSTORM?

According to Osborne there are four basic rules in brainstorming, meant to reduce the social inhibitions that occur in groups and contributing to the emergence of new ideas [13]
1. Focus on quantity: in order to produce really effective solutions, answers, ideas, there is a need for as many ideas generated as possible: \textit{quantity breeds quality}.

2. No criticism: no judgments are allowed throughout the brainstorming process so as to create a supportive environment where participants feel free to generate unusual even silly ideas.

3. Unusual ideas are welcome as they may open new ways of thinking and provide better solutions than the usual ones.

4. Combine and improve ideas: this approach may bring along better and more complete ideas than just producing ideas.

This is how it works:

1. Firstly, the topic or subject is written on the blackboard, and then anything that comes to mind related to the topic is noted down. Any first idea seen on the board triggers another idea, and it is advisable to keep writing until nothing else comes to mind. This has a motivating effect, as students will try harder when there is more than one idea on the board.

2. Secondly, it is the sorting out ideas phase, the necessary follow-up to brainstorming: evaluating ideas. The next stage in brainstorming is to go through all points, crossing out those that are not useful and retaining the viable ones that are most important for the topic.

In point of \textbf{teaching}, it is a challenge as initially, the students expect the teacher either to approve or disapprove, that is to perform 'the traditional teacher role'. The teacher must not do this, s/he only monitors language as before and does not intrusively interfere with corrections.

As far as the \textbf{learning} is concerned, students practise skills actively, a lot of listening and speaking, as they must state their ideas, reason their ideas and convince each other. Once an idea is being approved by the majority, the teacher will mark it as such.

3. Thirdly, from the information collected, the relevant points can be taken so as to make a mind map. Conceiving a mind map involves gathering all the ideas about a particular issue and organizing them into patterns that show the connections between them. The information can be classified into important points and less important points, into contrasting points, causes and effects etc.

4. Then, in order to draw a mind map, the topic will be written inside a circle, then, for each main point, arrows will be drawn around the circle and then smaller arrows out from the main arrows that link to each point.

\section*{4. CASE STUDY: MIND MAPPING AND BRAINSTORMING AS MEANS TO TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH TO 2$\textsuperscript{ND}$ YEAR STUDENTS OF ECONOMICS. TOPIC: GLOBALISATION}

From our university experience with Economics students, we consider teaching vocabulary the most challenging part of our teaching task as most of the times we have to do with students that have already acquired basic, everyday vocabulary and grammar; the next level is tackling specialized vocabulary. It can be boring, yet, a well set up and well executed case study, role-play or discussion can be a motivating and stimulating lesson for both students and teacher.

Some of the very recent experience we have been part of reassured us of the fact that conversations are invaluable, regardless the age or level of knowledge of the language, or the specialization the students are attending. Learners are quite happy to interact that is why it is of utmost importance to provoke them, to make them speak freely, to actively use the language in true-to-life situations.

Our business English students were familiar with speaking throughout the two hour practical course, as discussions and interactive exchanges were an important part of our learning process.

Brainstorming and mind mapping were quite unfamiliar to them at the beginning of the 1$\textsuperscript{st}$ year of study, sometimes students were unable to meet the requirements because of shyness, but practice and perseverance led us to what is today: a proper environment for learning through creative and interactive
exchanges. During the brainstorming activity which is now a part and parcel of the teaching and learning process, students respond without too many corrections or at all throughout the conversation as they usually like to believe that they have something interesting to say and that they are not just making mistakes on and on; they are building up confidence as everyone involved gets the feeling that they have contributed to the end solution.

Apart from its value of enriching the students’ vocabulary and of making them use it in a real, the natural communication act which the untraditional, innovative techniques have to offer – here brainstorming and mind mapping, is the advantage of attaining one of the most important educational aims of the present day Romanian school, that of the acquisition, learning and mastering of the new vocabulary in class; this is literally our task, and goal as teachers of Business English.

Here is presented the purpose of our research, the exploration of fresh, creative, sometimes unconventional methods when teaching foreign languages, understanding the most efficient ways to communicate them in terms of experimental lessons when we had to introduce specialized vocabulary to students who hadn’t tackled the topic in Romanian. We mainly aimed at proving that such student-centred techniques are more productive than the traditional lecture when it comes to teaching vocabulary.

As background information, Business English is taught weekly to students in Economics starting with the second year of academic studies. By the time they have to deal with economic concepts in English they are supposed to have already acquired some of them in their native language: management, banking, marketing, cultural understanding, accounting etc.

Nevertheless Globalisation - the topic we had decided upon for our research- seems to be a little more difficult topic to teach, even if it is a buzzword nowadays and globalization issues are all around. For illustration we shall present an instant of a communicative lesson (which has proved to be a success both with our students and with foreign students – French and Portuguese). The lesson had a great feedback, students were really captivated by the interaction, became really involved in discovering themselves, not just being spoon-fed by the teacher. There was a clear, unquestionable difference both in the quantity and quality of the language acquired from the traditional lessons where language was introduced or reinforced.

Objectives: to teach a new topic that implied a number of new unknown words in English.

Setting: 2nd year students.

Subjects: 19 students.

Teaching techniques: brainstorming and mind mapping at the beginning.

Procedure: Brainstorming as a technique for recalling the already acquired knowledge is the first one employed, followed by mind mapping used to work out the relationship between the points and ideas previously stated.

1. The central idea is presented by the teacher at the beginning in a warm-up session to expose novice participants to the free environment. A simple problem is brainstormed, for example: What is globalisation? What comes to your mind when hearing the word globalisation?

2. The word globalization is written on the blackboard inside a caption.

3. The main branches (the so-called Basic Organizing Ideas/ BOIs) are listed: music, communication, internet, culture etc.
4. Students brainstorm as many ideas as possible, the sub-branches start to come up and complete the visual image. During the brainstorm session the creativity may decrease. At this moment, the teacher should stimulate creativity by suggesting a question to answer, such as Can we combine these ideas? Or How about a look from another perspective? It is advisable for the teacher to prepare a list of such leads before the session begins.

5. The teacher presents a complete and colourful mind map of Globalisation containing images as well (previously prepared by the teacher).

6. Students and teacher compare and confront the two mind maps.

7. When time is up, the teacher organizes the ideas based on the topic goal and encourages discussion. Additional ideas may be generated. The main ideas are revised and used as key words for the further presentation of the topic.

8. Ideas are categorized using mind mapping, and then are used for the introduction of the topic to be taught or enlarged.

Brainstorming is thinking of ideas and mind mapping is organizing thoughts to write or speak about something clearly. When thinking, the brain instantly jumps from subject to subject and each and every student understands how it jumped from one thing to the next in his/her own way. There is no right or wrong answer.

Therefore, mind mapping and brainstorming proved to be inspirational at the beginning of the class, when first tackling the topic; communication was improved, topic was easier enlarged, the presentation became more interactive, ideas were easier conveyed and the feedback clearly demonstrated the understanding of the topic and the expanded vocabulary items acquired. Students were really challenged to come up with new
ideas on the concept elicited, the method creating a competition environment highly effective for learning new vocabulary and fluently practice speaking and listening.

CONCLUSIONS

Each science proves to be an open book for the new developments and trends that happen in the world. Language teaching makes no exception: new concerns have preoccupied the methodologists.

Nowadays the teaching of foreign languages focuses more on the spoken rather than on the written language, the means being the student-centred approach rather the traditional teacher-centred approach; the teacher is not a promoter of the information; s/he is a facilitator that helps students discover knowledge on their own. Students are no longer empty recipients, how is taught is far more important than what is being taught. Learning becomes an interactive, dynamic experience, an exchange of ideas, facts, connection between teacher and student and student –student as well.

Brainstorming and mind mapping, two communicative teaching/learning approaches visualise thought. Brainstorming is a creative method of group interaction that can be valued for both educational and business purposes, being an enjoyable exercise that is typically well received by participants. Mind mapping is the natural follow-up when ideas produced are classified for e better use. When employing them students not only take active part in the learning process, but they also see the results of their efforts and thus learning English becomes entertaining, meaningful, even tangible to them.

This was what we tried to demonstrate by using these means in our teaching and our hypothesis proved valid after having been tested on our 2nd year students of Economics.

By making use of diverse means and methods to achieve our ends, students learn to gain their freedom, to become confident and openly express ideas, they come to understand that they may indeed communicate fluently and successfully – not necessarily in English by the book, but in comprehensible simple English. Successful communication motivates the students. Motivation brings along desire to learn more. Being able to communicate in English is what our students need for their future careers.

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13. idem,


