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Working on selected social studies texts with EFL learners: combining oral and reading skills

1. Introduction

There have been many approaches to teaching English, be it as a foreign or as a second language. Some of them, such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), put an emphasis on enhancing communicative competence in EFL classrooms, or advocate learning through the sense of touch as in the case of Total Physical Response (TPR). The last decades, however, have witnessed a prolonged interest in an approach called Content Based Instruction, Content-Based Language Teaching or Content and Language Integrated Learning. Both ELT theoreticians and practitioners have been influenced by the key assumption of CBI/CLIL according to which language and content are inextricably linked to each other, and therefore cannot be separated in the teaching and learning process.

As it is claimed that social studies is the most suitable subject for language and content integration (King and Terry, 1995), the prime aim of the present chapter is to give an account of the way in which the integration of oral interaction and reading skills might be adopted as a general procedure in planning a set of EFL lessons based on social studies texts. This will be done by discussing an action research study conducted by the present author in one of Lublin upper-secondary schools.

2. Rationale for integrating language and content in the social studies classroom

On the basis of a comprehensive analysis of ELT literature touching upon the problems mentioned above it is possible to enlist a rationale for content-based instruction in the ESL social studies classroom (King and Terry, 1995; Cruz and Thornton, 2009).

1. In order to achieve academic success, learners should attain Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency – CALP (formal language of textbooks, higher-order thinking skills) and Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills – BICS (asking and answering simple recall questions, conversing about one's experiences). ESL social studies learners are exposed to rich language input (topic-

specific vocabulary) and are encouraged to draw conclusions, make comparisons and contrasts, determine relationships, etc.

2. Language and content are closely linked to each other, which ensures exposure to input in meaningful context. Social studies instruction in content-based classrooms treats learning as a holistic process in which the integration of both receptive and productive skills enables the natural use of language.

3. Language is a means of instruction. However, it is not the language itself that prevails in the classroom but content which is delivered within the frames of linguistic structures. Social sciences content provides ample opportunities for natural language acquisition, highlighting focus on meaning (content) rather than on linguistic structures.

3. Basic features of social studies instruction in ESL contexts

An analysis of academic literature regarding the characteristics of ESL social studies (e.g. Cruz and Thornton, 2009; King and Terry, 1995; Duff, 2001) makes it possible to provide an array of its features, which are worth considering in more detail.

1. **Conceptual planning and learning**: ESL students are exposed to a plethora of concepts that are crucial for understanding the content. Unlike other content areas that provide students just with facts applying just to single cases, conceptual learning allows for transfer to other contexts.

2. **Study** and **intellectual skills**: prerequisite for achieving academic success. Students may be required to create and analyse graphic organizers, find cause-effect relations, summarize texts, work with maps, identify problematic situations, analyse the problems, etc.

3. **Cooperative learning skills**: working in small or large groups, learners are induced to interact with their peers, which results in the development of BICS and CALP.

4. **Discovery** and **exploration**: students are to hypothesise and investigate on their own rather than expect to be given the answer. Moreover, learners are believed to be more intrinsically interested in their own discoveries.

5. **Background knowledge:** social sciences play a key role in the acculturation of ESL students due to emphasizing its pivotal importance in the learning process. Learning by content area helps learners better operate in the country that they have not understood fully.

As shown above, there are some characteristics of social studies instruction that are associated with content-based ESL contexts. Many of them like conceptualization, cooperative study and learning skills, discovery and expla-

nation are also strongly advocated by representatives of Content and Language Integrated Learning.

4. Selected principles of social studies instruction in CBI classrooms

Social studies classroom instruction is based on a set of principles to be followed both by learners and the teacher. In recent years, a number of scholarly publications discussing teaching social sciences from a content-based ESL perspective have appeared (e.g. Meyer, 2010; Cruz and Thornton, 2009; Short, 2002). Their study makes it possible to distinguish the following basic principles worth touching upon in more depth. They are:

- providing language and content input to promote rich classroom interaction;
- promoting scaffolding and cooperative learning;
- promoting conceptual-linguistic task-solving;
- encouraging situated learning to enhance learners' interactional competence.

In order to promote rich clasroom interaction teachers should provide comprehensible language that is just beyond the students' proficiency level; it needs to be challenging and meaningful but also **multi-modal** (Stoller, 2002), i.e. subject matter content is to be presented visually (charts, maps, diagrams, etc.). This enables multi-resource teaching and provides a sound basis for a deeper understanding of the content and complexity of the issues taught by means of a second language. Teachers should also provide activities that require an interactive use of the target language as this enhances the language acquisition process (Meyer, 2010; Gass and Selinker, 2008).

Scaffolding learning should be an instructional element of social studies classroom on account of the fact that it pushes learners towards task accomplishment by means of appropriate structuring. ESL teachers should also promote cooperative learning which entails "the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning" (Gillies, 2008: 26). Both scaffolding and cooperative learning are thought to enhance Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency, Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills, as well as higher-order thinking skills.

ESL teachers in content-based classrooms should also promote problem (task) solving (Heine, 2010) as it activates both content and language-specific information processing, so relevant in CBI/CLIL contexts. The more strongly the concept is linked to a particular item of information, the better it will be rooted in memory and, consequently, recalled better. The core elements of the

conceptual-linguistic task-solving model are: (1) construction of a mental representation of a task (understanding the task), (2) reception of language (being exposed to written input), and (3) production (mental thought is expressed by means of linguistic format).What is more, the model entails not only the factors and processes in solving a task but also the learner's variables, such as personality traits, intelligence, prior knowledge, which are believed to have a bearing on the student's problem-solving performance.

Situated learning, as proposed by Mondada and Pekarek (2004), perceives learning as a process greatly dependent on the learners' active participation in social practices and engagement in tasks that promote talk-in-interaction (Lave and Wenger, 1991). It encourages both theoreticians and instructors to put the learner in a new perspective so as to shed light on what happens inside the learner when engaged in a task in a particular social context. Moreover, the interactional nature of classroom tasks is conducive for learning on account of the fact that they are deeply based on social interaction.

In a similar vein, ESL learners should also enhance interactional competence (Celce-Murcia, 2007) being comprised of three elements: knowledge on language-specific speech acts (e.g. expressing one's opinions, problems; exchanging information), turn-taking and non-verbal communication. As generally known, developing communicative competence is vital for second language learning as it facilitates comprehending the management of social interactions and the use of language functions, such as apologizing, complaining, or introducing oneself. One can note then, that the main goals established for enhancing interactive skills in teaching social studies overlap, to a large extent, with those put forward by curent communcative language teaching methodologies.

5. The study

5.1 The purpose of the study

The general objective of the study is to investigate to what extent EFL learners involved in processing social studies content can rely on text-referenced information and background knowledge (non-text-based) while performing a range of text-based speaking activities.

The specific goals for the study were:

1. to assist the learners in comprehending the target social studies texts by using selected text-based speaking activities (e.g. reproducing the main concepts/ideas, activating basic schemata) involving critical thinking and problem solving;

2. to familiarize the students with relevant terminology and help them un-

derstand key concepts in the area;

3. to help the students develop non-linguistic academic skills (critical and problem solving skills, higher-order thinking);

4. to elicit the students' evaluation of the text-based speaking activities used and vocabulary learning techniques implemented to facilitate the acquisition of the content-relevant terminology.

5.2 Participants

The study was conducted in one of upper secondary schools in Lublin. The participants, 6 girls and 5 boys, were second grade students, aged between 17 and 18, with an extended social studies programme. Most of them attended some extracurricular English language classes in a private school or had private tutoring. All of the participants had been learning English for more than 6 years and their level of proficiency was upper-intermediate apart from a few students' language proficiency which was lower than that of their peers. As observed by the teacher during the study, the students were a closely-knit group with high motivation and broad content-specific knowledge in school subjects taught in L1.

5.3 Materials

It is important to highlight the fact that the coursebook the students used *New Matura Success*: *Upper-Intermediate* by Jane Comys-Carr, Jeniffer Parson and Renata Raczyńska (2012), which is based on the national English language curriculum, does not provide any text-based speaking activities representative of content-based ESL instruction. As a consequence, the group of the students taught by the present author had not had a chance to broaden the knowledge of social studies through the medium of English despite following an extended social science curriculum in Polish. Such an opportunity was created for the learners by a sequence of the four theme-based lessons dealing with the political life in Great Britain which were carried out as part of the present study.

Texts. Each of the four lessons was based on a text concerning a particular aspect of the British political life, that is (1) the British parliamentary monarchy, (2) the two-party system in Britain, (3) sovereignty, and (4) the British electoral system. The key criterion for the selection of the topics was their relevance for the study as well as the extent to which the four text-based speaking techniques selected for the study (discussion, simulation, problem-solving, and oral presentation) could be implemented in such a way as to ensure better acquisition

and retention of language and content-specific knowledge, as well as the use of adequate schemata. Three texts came from an ESL coursebook dealing with legal issues (Riley, 2006), and one was taken from the Internet website (http://www.dadalos.org/int/Parteien/grundkurs4/gb/merkmale.htm). Due to the frequent use of highly sophisticated vocabulary and the density of ideas covered in these texts, some of them were shortened. During one lesson the learners were provided with an English-Polish glossary covering difficult vocabulary items.

Worksheets (see Appendix 1). There was one worksheet per lesson. Their design was strictly determined by the topic of a particular lesson. All the activities were self-prepared by the author and they followed the same sequence. Starting with the focus on the topic in order to **activate the learners' background knowledge** (e.g. making predictions on the basis of a set of pictures or a definition, creating definitions by learners, etc.) the subsequent activities engaged the students in a text-based work combined with **vocabulary work** (matching, multiple choice questions, translation, filling graphic organizers and missing gaps, answering open-ended questions, etc.) whose key objective was to draw attention to the content and vocabulary items included in the text. The four types of speaking activities (**discussion, simulation, problem-solving, oral presentation**) implemented during the last part of each lesson provided the students with ample opportunities to retain both the content of the text as well as lexical items they were exposed to.

Interview with the teacher aimed to gather information on speaking activities used with the students' during their English classes, common communication and reading comprehension problems as well as their stance to speaking English in the classroom.

Questionnaires (see Appendix 2). The **pre-study questionnaire** addressed such issues like: the experience of reading social studies texts in English, the source of learners' knowledge about current political world events, their likes/dislikes concerning topics covered in social studies L1 curriculum. Moreover, the students were asked about their experience regarding various factors affecting social studies text comprehension or their preference of vocabulary focus techniques as well as their attitude towards speaking techniques and factors affecting speaking English. The **post-study questionnaire** aimed to find answers to the questions addressing reading comprehension and communication problems that the students had faced during the study as well as to their attitudes towards the speaking techniques used.

Classroom observation protocols (see Appendix 3) were also used so as to reflect on each lesson and identify certain aspects of classroom interaction (teacher-class, student-student patterns) after the lesson. Moreover, the stu-

dents' attitude to the speaking activities was also described. As for their design, the protocols consisted of nine yes/no statements with some additional space for the observer's comments.

5.4 Design and procedure

For the purpose of the study the group of eleven students met twice a week for two 45-minute lessons within a two weeks time. As far as the interview with the teacher is concerned, she was asked 6 questions in Polish connected with such issues as: text-based work, techniques of introducing new vocabulary, her experience with the implementation of various speaking techniques, the students' attitude to speaking English in the classroom as well as communicational/interactional problems which her students usually faced. The second phase of the study was the seven-question pre-study questionnaire which was filled in by the students in fifteen minutes' time in the first lesson.

Then the four lessons followed whose aim was to exploit the four specifically selected text-based speaking techniques in a social studies reading-oriented class. During **the first lesson** devoted to the British parliamentary monarchy the students were exposed to the whole-class discussion during which they had to express their opinions on abolishment of monarchy in the United Kingdom. In a similar vein, **the second lesson** concerning the two-party system provided students with ample opportunities to practise speaking. This time, working in pairs, the learners were involved in a simulation during which one of them was a member of the Conservative Party and the other of the Labour Party. Equally important, **the third lesson** was the students' oral presentation on the British electoral system. In order to prepare for it, they worked on a graphical representation of its content in groups. During **the fourth lesson** the learners practised speaking by means of a problem-solving task regarding the notion of the parliamentary sovereignty. The general scheme of the lessons was very similar. The students were presented with a pre-reading activity (serving as an attention-raising tool, background knowledge check and text-related vocabulary focus). Then they were exposed to a content-specific text which was followed by a comprehension check. Finally, there was a text-based speaking activity giving the students ample opportunities to revise and consolidate all the information from the text they read.

One of the most important elements of every lesson was the two-part self-prepared classroom observation protocol. It served as an efficient tool for observing and evaluating certain interactional aspects relevant for the present study. It was filled in by the author during a five-minute break between the lessons.

At the end of the fourth lesson the students filled in the post-study questionnaire which was administered to obtain the data on the efficiency of the implemented speaking techniques, identify both reading and communication problems the students faced, etc. Table 1 below shows the design of the whole study.

Interview with the teacher **Pre-study questionnaire**	
Lesson One *Great Britain as an example of the parliamentary monarchy*	
TASKS	**OBJECTIVES**
– predicting the relationship between three photos, – selecting the most important information in the text, – filling in a graphic organizer with information from the text, – looking for Polish equivalents of English words, – answering comprehension questions, – whole-class discussion about abolishment of monarchy in Great Britain	Students: – have basic knowledge about three British state organs, – implement the strategy of predicting on the basis of three photos, – use the strategies of skimming and scanning, – complete a graphic organizer with information from the text, – take part in a whole-class discussion expressing their opinion, – use English-Polish glossary for better reading comprehension
Classroom-observation protocol	
Lesson Two *Assumptions of the classical two-party system*	
TASKS	**OBJECTIVES**
– predicting the relationship between the photos and the topic of the lesson, – identifying and highlighting important ideas covered in the text, – creating a text-based definition of two-party system, – paraphrasing words and phrases occurring in particular context in the text, – interpreting information provided in the text, – text-based simulation concerning Britain's leave from the European Union	Students: – know the major assumption of the British two-party system, – implement the strategy of predicting on the basis of photos, – use the strategies of skimming and scanning, – take part in a text-based simulation, – use their background knowledge for the oral task accomplishment

Classroom observation protocol	
Lesson Three *The notion of sovereignty on the basis of the relation between the British Parliament and other state organs*	
TASKS	**OBJECTIVES**
– predicting the term on the basis of its definition, – translating English collocations with the word sovereignty into Polish, – deciding which words fit the context given on the basis of the text, – interpreting the meaning of the title of the text, – identifying a problem covered in the text, – filling in a problem-solving diagram and discussing its results	Students: – understand the notion of sovereignty, – know different collocations with this word, – interpret the meaning of the title, – identify a problem in the text, – are involved in a problem-solving speaking task trying to solve the problem mentioned in the text by filling in a diagram
Classroom observation protocol	
Lesson 4 *The British electoral system*	
TASKS	**OBJECTIVES**
– matching English words from the text with their Polish equivalents, – filling in gaps in the text with its missing fragments, – working on a group project, – delivering an oral presentation on the British electoral system, – deciding on the meaning of words on the basis of the context in which they appear in the text	Students: – know the characteristic features of the British electoral system, – use the strategies of skimming and scanning, – prepare a group oral presentation on the electoral system in Britain, – work independently from the teacher
Classroom observation protocol	
Post-study questionnaire	

Table 1. Design of the study incorporating four speaking activities into social studies texts

5.5 Results and discussion

In order to meet the key aims of the present study, and to collect and analyse all the data needed the author as a researcher-teacher implemented the research tools described above starting with the interview of the teacher.

5.5.1 The interview with the teacher

Interviewing the teacher helped the author to identify a few crucial problems relevant for a better understanding of the learning problems of the students he was going to work with. The teacher drew attention to the fact that the students had significant problems with understanding vocabulary and grammar structures while performing reading comprehension tasks. She believed that the most effective vocabulary learning technique in the group was guessing from context. She also added that the learners had already gained vast experience in terms of exposure to role-plays/simulations and discussions/debates. However, certain communication problems could be observed, such as peer-pressure and anxiety. Furthermore, as far as the students' general attitude to speaking English in the classroom was concerned, the teacher pointed to the fact that the learners were aware of the need of oral skills enhancement in order to communicate effectively. Apart from peer-pressure in oral interaction two other interactional problems were highlighted, namely frequent code-switching and uneven distribution of time for speaking in pairs (less and more talkative students).

5.5.2 The results of the pre-study questionnaire

As already mentioned, the aim of the pre-study questionnaire was to obtain information concerning the subjects' prior experience with reading social studies texts as well as their attitude towards speaking English. Only 3 out of 11 students stated that they had prior contact with social studies texts in English. As for the main sources of the students' knowledge on current political and social events (Question2, Figure1) the television (10 responses) as well as the Internet (9 responses) were identified as the main sources the students used. Many students also derived their knowledge from social studies lessons, the press and radio (7 answers each). The English language coursebooks and literature seemed to be hardly used as a source of gaining information on the subject (see Figure 1) .

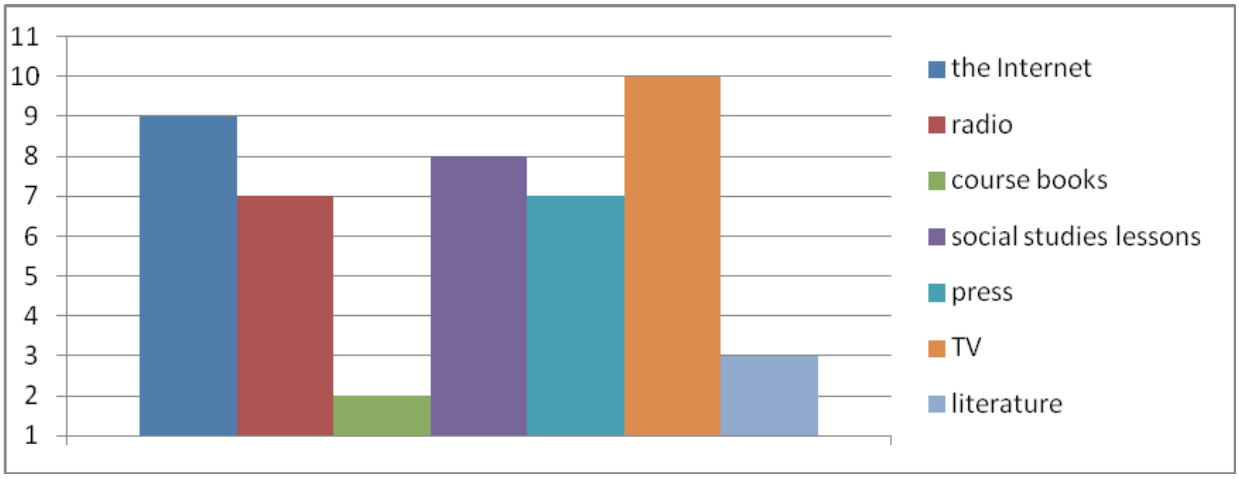

Figure 1. Sources of the subjects' knowledge on current socio-political events (N=11)

In the subsequent question the students were asked to rank seven social studies lesson topics from the most to the least interesting. There was no consistency among the answers provided by the respondents. The human rights were found to be the most interesting topic covered in the social studies curriculum, although political systems/forms of government along with international relations were also indicated as relevant. As for the most serious problems the students found while reading social studies texts (Question 3) they were sophisticated vocabulary and the lack of background knowledge, as shown in Figure 2 below.

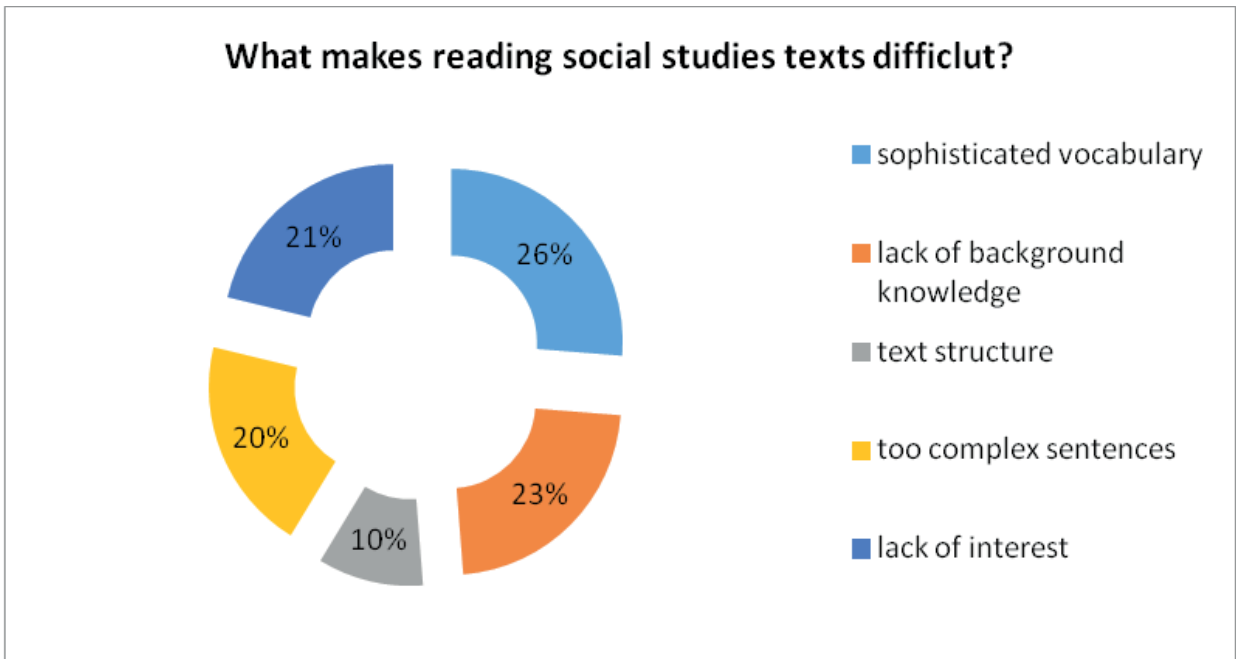

Figure 2. Problems faced by the subjects while reading social studies texts

Responding to Question 5 on the effectiveness of vocabulary presentation techniques, the students found explanation in L1 or L2, providing a synonym/antonym of a word most effective and multiple-choice tasks the least effective. Guessing word meanings from context, highlighted by the regular English teacher during the interview, was found to be the third-most effective technique by the students. Therefore, a discrepancy between the English language teacher's observation and the subjects' response should be noted. In ranking the negative impact on speaking skills the respondents (10 out of 11) indicated the lack of vocabulary as the dominant factor having a negative impact on oral performance. Equally important, 4 students pointed to pronunciation as insignificant for speaking skills, and strangely enough, the lack of ideas was found to have a highly detrimental effect on speaking just for one person.

5.5.3 The results of the post-study questionnaire

The prime aim of the post-study questionnaire was to establish whether there was a shift in the students' attitude towards the text-based speaking activities as they perceived them before and after the 4 lessons conducted for the purpose of the study. Secondly, not only were the students asked about both reading- and speaking-related problems but they also had to estimate the frequency of using a particular way of preparing for oral reproduction of the major text-based concepts and ideas.

First, the participants provided 9 (out of 11) positive answers to Question 1 – whether the vocabulary focus techniques they were exposed to helped them to acquire the target vocabulary. As far as Question 2 is concerned, it was the same question as Question 4 in the pre-study questionnaire. Table 2 presents the number of the students who found the particular reading aspects as most problematic before the study and after the study.

The reading aspects	**The number of the students reporting them as most problematic**	
	Before the study	**After the study**
Sophisticated vocabulary	3	3
Lack of background knowledge	3	2
Text structure	1	2
Too complex sentences (syntax)	2	3
Lack of interest	2	1

Table 2. The comparison of the reading problems the students faced before and after the study.

It can be concluded that the differences between the students' responses before and after the study were marginal. Generally, it was content-related vocabulary that was found by 3 students to be the greatest obstacle in reading social studies texts. A slight drop was observed between the answers concerning the lack of appropriate schemata (background knowledge) before and after the study, and a minor rise in the students' responses concerning the text structure. In a similar vein, too complex sentences (syntax) proved to be a little more challenging than the students believed before the study. The lack of interest in a topic was noted to be less problematic after the study.

As far as the respondents' perceptions of the impact of the four speaking activities practiced on their attitude towards speaking are concerned, the four techniques (1) role-play/simulation, (2) discussion/debate, (3) oral presentation, (4) problem/task-solving were identified as the second, the first, the fourth and the third places respectively before the study. This changed into the first place for discussion/debate and oral presentation, with no change of place for role-play/simulation and problem/task-solving after the study. Thus, it was satisfactory to observe that oral presentation had changed its status and began to be perceived by the learners as a valuable speaking technique.

The fourth question, a multiple-answer question, aimed to find out what problems the students had to tackle while performing oral activities. The students reported relatively few problems they encountered. Four responses considered vocabulary, 3 – lack of ideas, and peer pressure and grammar were mentioned by only 2 learners. Pronunciation was found to be the least problematic as it was mentioned only by one student. It is worth noticing that vocabulary was also mentioned as the most problematic issue in speaking English in ESL social studies classes in the pre-study questionnaire.

Question 5 analysed the frequency of the students' use of the particular strategies to prepare for oral reproduction of the main concepts/ideas of the texts. The averages were calculated (the max.= 5.0) for each strategy. According to the subjects, the most frequently used strategies were paraphrasing and classmate's help (3.9), whereas note-taking was implemented slightly more infrequently (3.5). Then using an original text without any elaboration followed (3.0), and the least frequently used strategy was text summary (2.5).

5.5.4 Classroom observation protocols

Four classroom observation protocols were completed by the author of the study a few minutes after each lesson had been finished. They were designed and incorporated into the study on account of their value as a tool facilitating

the discovery of such aspects of classroom work as general classroom interaction and speaking activities-based work. The data collected made it possible to draw some conclusions that are presented in the sections to follow.

1. All the oral production-oriented activities seemed to motivate the students to make their contributions. The subjects shared their broad knowledge in the field of social studies. Less able and shy learners attempted to be active in the course of the four lessons.
2. The subjects used English as a means of communication during most of the time devoted to practising oral skills. No code-switching was observed during the study. The students were noticed to manage to carry on talking despite communication breakdowns. Their problems most often concerned lexis, that is content-specific vocabulary, English equivalents of Polish words, and synonyms of the words occurring in the text.
3. Exposure to visual resources helped the teacher elicit schemata-based knowledge from the subjects effectively as well as it seemed to facilitate their oral production (graphic organizer in Lesson One or the problem-solving diagram in Lesson Two).
4. Group work as well as whole-class interaction seemed to be highly conducive to oral language production. Involved in a discussion, the learners had a chance to present their opinions on the topic, and had numerous opportunities to reduce anxiety caused by speaking in public. The tasks enabled them to reproduce various concepts and ideas covered in the text they read. Furthermore, they could practise turn-taking as well as fluency in oral communication. The problem-solving task ensured collaboration among the group members providing all the students with equal chances to speak before the very while-speaking phase.

6. Conclusions

On the basis of the results of this action research study, one cannot deny the great value integrating reading skills and oral interaction in EFL contexts has. The present study has markedly proved that incorporating oral interaction into text-based work in social studies oriented lessons can be extremely effective in terms of English language instruction. The comprehensive analysis of the classroom-based data collected for the study revealed some interesting outcomes, which can be briefly enumerated as follows.

1. The subjects showed that not only the knowledge acquired during the lessons but also appropriate content schemata are indispensable in performing oral activities in social studies classrooms.

2. The students' attitude to oral presentation as a text-based speaking activity changed considerably for the better after the study. While at the beginning of the study just two students out of eleven marked it as useful in practising oral skills, at the end of it the technique received the highest mark.

3. Discussions along with role-plays proved to be the most useful text-based speaking techniques in dealing with social studies texts.

4. Group work and whole-class interaction were observed to be more conducive for knowledge retention and oral skills practice than pair work

5. The learners' insufficient vocabulary range as well as the lack of ideas turned out to be the biggest hindrance during oral work.

It is unquestionable that in order to arrive at further conclusions a large-scale study involving a representative group of students is needed, then more reliable and generalizable results can be arrived at.

Nowadays many English language instructors point to the fact that EFL coursebooks as well as the curricula followed leave too little space for oral interaction in classroom conditions. The pressure of time caused by preparations for state exams, the emphasis on grammar and vocabulary knowledge and heavily text-centred work are not conducive to emphasizing oral language production. Therefore, instead of planning non-text-referenced speaking activities, making students rely solely on their background knowledge, English language teachers can simply incorporate elements of oral interaction to the already existing coursebook materials. This in turn can be highly effective not just in terms of content knowledge retention but also in enhancing learners' communicative skills. In a similar vein, oral reproduction of concepts and language items from texts makes the learning process natural, contextualized and meaningful for EFL learners.

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Appendix 1: Lesson 1 – Great Britain as an example of the parliamentary monarchy

Activity 1. Answer the question: What is the relationship between the following pictures?

Taken from: http//www.google.com

Activity 2.

Work in groups of 3. Read a passage concerning one particular state organ. Read it briefly. Highlight the most important ideas and transfer them into the appropriate place in the diagram.

State organs of the UK

The constitutional principles, rules and practices of the United Kingdom have never been codified; they derive from statute law, from common law, and from conventions of the constitution which are not laws at all, but political practices which have become considered as indispensable to the smooth working of the machinery of government. The monarchy, followed by the legislative and executive of government will be discussed in turn.

a. The *monarchy* is the most ancient secular institution in the United Kingdom, with a continuous history stretching back over a thousand years. The monarchy is hereditary and the present title to the Crown derives from provisions of the Act of Settlement of 1701 which secured the Protestant succession. This succession cannot now be altered, under a provision of the Statute of Westminster, 1931, except by common consensus of the member states of the Commonwealth which **owe allegiance** to the Crown.

Queen Elizabeth II, who succeeded to the throne in 1952, is. in addition to being an integral part of the legislature, the head of the judiciary, the commander-in-chief of the armed forces of the Crown and the temporal head of the established Church of England. The monarchy in the United Kingdom has evolved over the centuries from absolute personal authority to the present constitutional form by which the Queen reigns but does not rule. Her Majesty's government governs in the name of the Queen who must act on the advice of her ministers. The Queen summons, prorogues (dismisses at the end of a session) and dissolves Parliament; she usually opens new sessions of Parliament with a speech from the throne in which the major governmental policies are outlined. These acts form part of the Royal Prerogative, defined by *Dicey* as "the **residue** of discretionary or arbitrary authority, which at any given time is left in the hands of the Crown'. Prerogative rights are of legislative, executive and judicial character. The Monarch must give the **Royal Assent** before a Bill which has passed all its stages in both Houses of Parliament can become a legal enactment (Act of Parliament). The Monarch's consent and approval is required before a Cabinet can be formed or a minister takes up office. As Head of State the Monarch has the power to sign international agreements, to **cede** or receive territory, and to declare war or make peace.

The Monarch confers honours and makes appointments to all important offices of state, including judges, officers in the armed services, diplomats and the leading positions in the Established Church. As the 'fountain of justice', it is only the Monarch who is able to **remit** all or part of the penalties imposed upon persons convicted of crimes through the exercise of the prerogative of mercy on the advice of the appropriate minister.

GLOSSARY

to owe allegiance - winnym lojalność
to cede - odłączać (ziemię)
to remit - darować (karę)
residue - pozostałość
the Royal Assent - podpis-zgoda monarchy

II

b. ***Legislature***. - Parliament is the legislative organ and is constitutionally composed of the Monarch, the House of Lords, and the House of Commons. The Queen in Parliament represents the supreme authority within the United Kingdom.

The *Parliament at Westminster* legislates for the United Kingdom, for any one of the

constituent countries, or for any combination of them. It may legislate on certain 'excepted' and 'reserved' matters for Northern Ireland, subject to the provisions of the Northern Ireland Constitution Act, 1973. It may also legislate for the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, under certain conditions, although these islands possess their own ancient legislatures. The Parliament Act, 1911 provides that the life of one Parliament may not exceed five years. Parliament consists of two Houses: the House of Lords and the House of Commons.

The *House of Lords* is for the most part still a hereditary body. It consists of the Lords Temporal and the Lords Spiritual. The Lords Temporal include hereditary **peers** and peeresses who have not disclaimed their peerages under the Peerages Act, 1963; life peers and peeresses created by the Crown under the Life Peerages Act (1958) in recognition of public service; and the Lords of Appeal in Ordinary. The House of Lords is presided over by the Lord Chancellor who is *ex officio* chairman of the House, The Lords Spiritual include the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, the Bishops of London, Durham and Winchester, and the 21 most senior diocesan bishops of the Church of England.

The *House of Commons* is an elected and representative body; members (at present 650) are elected by almost universal adult suffrage to represent constituencies in England (523),

Scotland (72), Wales (38) and Northern Ireland (17). The law relating to Parliamentary elections is contained in substance in the Representation of the People Act, 1949, as amended. Any British subject aged 21 or over, not otherwise disqualified (as for example, members of the House of Lords, certain clergy, **undischarged** bankrupts, civil servants, holders of judicial office, members of the regular armed services and the police forces) may be elected a Member of Parliament (M.P.). Members are paid a salary and an allowance for secretarial and office expenses; after a Parliament is dissolved all seats are subject to a General Election. By-elections take place when a vacancy occurs during the life of a Parliament, as when a member dies, is elevated to the House of Lords or accepts an 'office of profit' under the Crown. The *Speaker of the House of Commons* is elected by the members from the members to preside over the House immediately after each new Parliament is formed. He is an impartial arbiter over Parliamentary procedure and the traditional guardian of the rights and privileges of the House of Commons.

GLOSSARY

constituent	składowy
provide	gwarantować, zapewniać
preside over	przewodniczyć
to amend	poprawiać
an arbiter	mediator, osoba rozstrzygająca spór
concurrence	zgodność
to clarify	wyjaśnić
peer	członek Izby Lordów
undischarged	niespłacony

III

c ***Executive.*** - The government consists of the ministers appointed by the Crown on the recommendation of the Prime Minister, who is appointed directly by the Crown and is the leader of the political party which for the time being has a majority of seats in the House of Commons.

The office of Prime Minister dates from the eighteenth century and is the subject of a number of constitutional conventions. The Prime Minister is the head of the government and presides over meetings of the Cabinet; by convention he is always a Member of the House of Commons. He consults and advises the Monarch on government business, supervises and to some extent co-ordinate the work of the various ministries and departments and is the principal spokesman for the

government in the House of Commons. He also makes recommendations to the Monarch on many important public appointments, including the Lord Chief Justice, Lords of Appeal in Ordinary, and Lords Justices of Appeal.

The Cabinet is the nucleus of government; its members consist of a small group of the most important ministers who are selected by the Prime Minister. The size of the Cabinet is today about 23 and its principal function, much of the work being carried out in Committee, is to determine, control and integrate the policies of the government for submission to Parliament. The Cabinet meets in private and its deliberations are secret; no vote is taken, and, by the principle of 'Cabinet **unanimity**', collective responsibility is assumed for all decisions taken. The central government ministries and departments **give effect to** government policies and have powers and duties conferred on them by legislation, and, sometimes, under the Royal Prerogative. Each is headed by a minister who is in most cases a member of either the House of Lords or the House of Commons. There are over 100 ministers of the Crown at the present time; they include departmental ministers (e.g., the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs; Chancellor of the Exchequer (Treasury); Secretary of State for Social Services); non-departmental ministers (e.g., Lord President of the (Privy) Council, Paymaster-General, (additional ministers in departments whose work is heavy); and junior ministers (usually known as Parliamentary Secretary or Parliamentary Under-Secretary) in all ministries and departments. The Lord Chancellor and the Law Officers of the Crown deserve special mention at this point. The Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain presides over the House of Lords both in its legislative capacity and as a final court of appeal; he is a member of the Cabinet and also has departmental responsibilities in connection with the appointment of certain judges. He advises on, and frequently initiates, law reform programmes with the aid of the Law Commissions, the Law Reform Committee and *ad hoc* committees. The four Law Officers of the Crown include, for England and Wales, the Attorney-General and the Solicitor-General; for Scotland, the Lord Advocate and the Solicitor-General for Scotland. The English Law Officers are usually members of the House of Commons and the Scottish Law Officers may be. They represent the Crown in civil litigation, prosecute in certain exceptionally important criminal cases, and advise government on points of law.

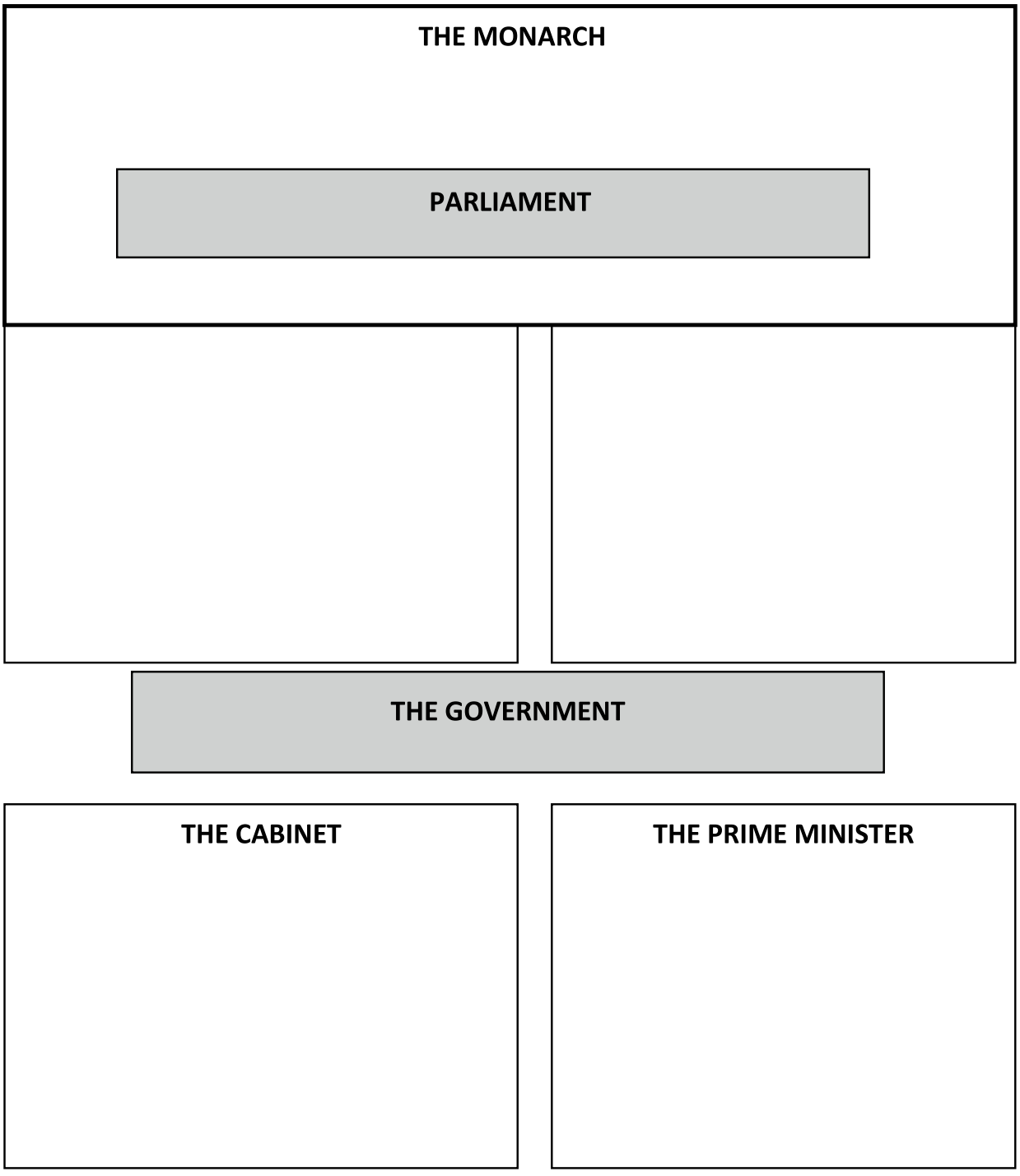
GLOSSARY

to supervise	nadzorować
to give effect	wcielać w życie
unanimity	jednomyślność

Adapted from Riley (2006)

Activity 3.

Fill in the following graphic organizer with the information that you **chose and highlighted** in the text concerning your state organ. Then tell your group mates what you have learned about it. When you have finished, listen to other members of the group sharing with you the newly acquired knowledge about other state organs and fill in the diagram with the information provided.



Adapted from Riley (2006)

Activity 4.

You will take part in a class discussion which will try to answer the question: *Should monarchy in Britain be abolished?* Before it starts, think about in which group you would like to seat: the advocates or the opponents of monarchy? Then join your group and try to think about arguments referring to the text you have read.

Activity 5.

Read the whole text and find in the text English equivalents of following words. Numbers of paragraphs where the words appear will help you.

MONARCHY

a) postanowienie (2) .....
b) dziedziczny (2) .....
c) zwołać (np. obrady parlamentu) (3) .....
d) uchwała, dekret (4) .....

LEGISLATURE

f) zrzekać się (prawa do czegoś) (3) .....
g) z urzędu (zwrot łaciński) (3) .....
h) powszechne prawo wyborcze (pełnoletnich) (3) .....

EXECUTIVE

i) trzon, rdzeń (3) .....
j) cywilne postępowanie (prawne) (3) .....
k) nałożony (obowiązek) (3) .....

Activity 6.

Answer the following questions:

1. What, in your opinion, does it mean that *the Queen reigns but does not rule?*
2. How do you understand the term *the Royal Prerogatives*?
3. What is the most rudimentary principle of the British constitution? How can you explain it?

Appendix 2: Questionnaires

Pre-study questionnaire

1. Have you ever read a text in English concerning social studies? Put a cross next to your answer.

YES ☐ NO ☐

2. Where does your knowledge about current political and social events come from? Put a cross next to the chosen answers.

☐ the Internet ☐ radio programmes ☐ course books ☐ social studies lessons

☐ press ☐ TV programmes and movies ☐ literature ☐ other:.....

3. Which of the following topics would you consider as interesting and therefore relevant in learning social studies? Rank them according to the scale (1-7), where 1= most interesting and 7= least interesting.

political systems/forms of government _____
political parties _____
human rights _____
party systems _____
international relationships _____
legal acts (e.g. constitution) _____
electoral systems _____

4. What, in your opinion, makes reading social studies texts difficult? Mark the answers given using the scale from 1-5, where 1 = most difficult and 5= least difficult.

sophisticated vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5
lack of background knowledge about the topic	1	2	3	4	5
text structure (organization of paragraphs, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
too complex sentences	1	2	3	4	5
lack of interest in the topic	1	2	3	4	5

5. Which of the following ways of presenting vocabulary do you find effective? Rank them according to the scale (1-6), where 1= most effective and 6= least effective.

a) equivalent in native language .....
b) synonym/antonym .....
c) guessing the meaning on the base of context .....
d) explanation in mother tongue or foreign language .....
e) visual representation .....
f) multiple-choice .....

6. What types of speaking activities should, in your opinion, be frequently used while practising oral skills? Put a cross next to your answers.

☐ role-plays/simulations ☐ discussions/debates ☐ oral presentations

☐ problem/task-solving ☐ oral drills (repetitions) ☐ communicative games

7. Which of the following factors have a negative impact on speaking English? Rank them according to the scale (1-5), where 1= lowest impact and 5= highest impact. Refer to your own experiences.

lack of vocabulary ..... pronunciation ..... anxiety ..... poor grammar .....

lack of ideas other: _____

Put a cross next to chosen answer

1. Gender: ☐ Woman ☐ Man

2. How long have you been learning English?
☐ less than 3 years ☐ more than 3 years but less than 6 ☐ 6 years or longer

3. Do you learn English apart from your language classes at school?
☐ Yes, on my own ☐ Yes, in language school ☐ Yes, in private tutoring
☐ No, I do not

Post-study questionnaire

1. Did the vocabulary learning techniques you were exposed to help you in its acquisition? Circle the chosen answer and justify it.

YES RATHER YES RATHER NO NO

.....
.....

2. What problems did you encounter while reading the four texts? Rank the texts according to the scale (1-6), where 1= least problematic and 6= most problematic.

lack of interest in the topic	
text structure	
complex syntax	
background knowledge	
difficult vocabulary	

3. Do you think that the text-based speaking activities had a positive impact on your attitude towards speaking? Mark the answers given using a scale from 1-5, where 1= huge impact and 5= low impact.

role play/simulation	1	2	3	4	5
discussion/debate	1	2	3	4	5
oral presentation	1	2	3	4	5
problem/task solving	1	2	3	4	5

4. What major problems did you have while performing oral activities? Circle 3 answers.

peer-pressure pronunciation grammar vocabulary
lack of ideas other: .....

5. What did you do in order to prepare for oral reproduction of the main concepts/ideas of the texts you read? Mark the answers given using a scale from 1-5, where 1= never and 5= very often.

I took down notes	1	2	3	4	5
I paraphrased the most important parts of the text	1	2	3	4	5
I wrote a summary of the text	1	2	3	4	5
I used visual aids (graphic organizer, diagram, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
I asked my classmate for help	1	2	3	4	5
I used the original version of the text	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix 3: Classroom Observation Protocol

Observation Date	**Observer**	**Class**	**Recorded**
	Sebastian Parczewski	**2 D**	**YES / NO**
School			

Topic of the lesson				
Speaking activity implemented in the lesson				
Students # Absent Females _____ _____ Males _____ _____ Total _____ _____	Time Start			
	Time End			

Speaking activities & student interaction		**YES**	**NO**	**Comment**
1.	Students had enough time to accomplish the speaking activities.			
2.	Instructions provided by the teacher were clear for students.			
3.	The speaking activity/-ies seemed to increase the learners' participation in the lesson			
4.	Students were using English as a means of communication during most of the time devoted for practising oral skills.			
5.	Even though students faced communication breakdowns, they managed to carry on talking.			
6.	Exposure to visual resources (e.g. photos) help the teacher elicit schemata-based knowledge from the subjects.			
7.	Visuals implemented in the pre-speaking phase of the lesson (like graphic organizer, problem-solving diagram, etc.) seemed to facilitate learners' oral production.			
8.	Group work/Whole-class interaction seemed to be conducive for oral language production.			
9.	The students asked teacher for clarifications in terms of speaking task accomplishment (instructions, hints, providing learners with vocabulary items/ideas, etc.)			

(liczba znaków ze spacjami: 53 003)