



## JUST A THOUGHT

(Information Overload Disorder)

**Karmen Feher**

‘Luka, come to the blackboard, please’, I said, ‘and write the letters of the word Lea is going to spell for you.’ At that moment I had no idea what was going to follow. Knowing that Luka is a very bright ten-year-old boy, very eager to learn English and who usually has no problems with spelling and pronunciation, I was sure the writing would be done very quickly and there would soon be another pupil standing in front of the class trying to get all the letters right. But I was wrong. Luka had mixed up an ‘i’ with an ‘e’ and burst into tears. After being asked about it, he sobbed: ‘It’s wrong.’ ‘So?’ I asked, at the same time trying to think of something reassuring to say to him. ‘But I know it.’ he quietly added. Then it dawned on me that this boy (and boys cry, too!) was crying for two reasons. Firstly, he had made a mistake and secondly, he had made a mistake in spite of knowing the pronunciation of the letters perfectly well. We managed to solve the problem, the boy calmed down and we proceeded with the lesson. However, was that just another anecdote in a teacher’s life? I wonder. But maybe it was yet another case of a learner trying to reach perfection.

There is no doubt that we are entering a new era with regards to teaching and learning foreign languages. Better access to enormous amounts of information, which we sometimes find difficult to consume, let alone process, has its consequences. Multimedia, the Internet, and advances in the publishing industry, which produces masses of new teaching materials and reference books, have definitely opened up more opportunities for developments in education. As a result, our learners are becoming more knowledgeable and they are acquiring all the necessary language tools they will need in the future. They need to deal with and memorize large amounts of information delivered by teachers who are themselves constantly trying to absorb everything new. And they have both become quite good at it. However, in spite of all these improvements we cannot disregard the appearance of what is called 'Information Overload Syndrome' which seems to be wearing out both learners and teachers. Do we really have to know everything?

According to the Common European Framework all individual knowledge is partial:

All knowledge of language is partial, however much of a ‘mother tongue’ or ‘native language’ it seems to be. It is always incomplete, never as developed or perfect in an ordinary individual as it would be for the utopian ‘ideal native speaker’. (K. Morrow, Insights from CEF, 15)

Taking this into account, it is not surprising that recently stress has been put on learning how to learn. After all, learning is indeed a never-ending story. Therefore, what we really need to learn is the skills which would not only enable us to acquire as much new knowledge as we need in order to function in modern society, but also help us to activate the knowledge we already possess. But even this will not lead us to perfection. Let us not forget that ‘to err is human’, so making mistakes within the learning context should be allowed for, especially as this does not mean incompetence. Rather, it is an occasional production of incorrect language. From this, we can conclude that one of the primary tasks of teachers should be to help learners to accept and even welcome occasional mistakes. This will enable pupils to learn something new from their mistakes and help them remember language they have already acquired. Moreover, it would turn learning a foreign language into a less stressful and a more pleasant experience.

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