EXPERIMENTING WITH DOGME

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The word *teaching* tends to evoke a huge list of associations, among which photocopying occupies the top position. Most teachers tend to spend half of their teaching life in quest of student-friendly materials, photocopying hundreds of pages and designing materials. To address our learners' need for interesting content, teachers, often try to combine compulsory materials with optional ones. On the one hand, this practice equips the teacher with a solid lesson plan; on the other hand, this habit affects the learners' approach to classes and trains them not to leave the classroom empty-handed.

The present paper seeks to address ways of experimenting with Dogme, a communicative approach not reliant on coursebooks and advocating conversation-driven communication in the classroom

As foreign language teachers, we want to make sure that learning always takes place in the classroom and that learners can take a new language item with them, which they will be looking forward to playing and experimenting with in their later contact with the language. Dogme in this regard has the merit of generating the necessary language in the classroom and helping the teacher to respond to learners' needs. It is not the teacher, or the coursebook that decides which language should be taught but the learners themselves. In this respect, with the input of Dogme elements or moments, as Thornbury refers to them (2009), teachers will be able to reflect more on their classroom teaching and extend their learners an opportunity to analyze and acquire the language through real conversations.

Dogme teaching philosophy owes its name to *Dogme 95* film movement initiated by Larsen Trier. The intention of the movement advocates was to cleanse cinema of sophisticated techniques and restore it to its original format, foregrounding the story and the inner life of characters.

In English language teaching, Dogme promotes teaching without coursebooks and focuses on conversational communication among learners and teacher. The concept itself was first addressed by Scott Thornbury[1] who argued that the world of English language teaching was so much saturated with a large variety of resources that there was no time and space left for real communication.

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[1] **Thornbury, S.** (2000). *A Dogma for EFL. IATEFL Issue 153. February/March. Retrieved from http://nebula.wsimg.com/fa3dc70521483b645f4b932209f9db17? AccessKeyId=186A535D1BA4FC995A73&disposition=0&alloworigin=1 29 August, 2015.*

To address this need, Thornbury in partnership with his fellow teacher Neil Forrest, laid down some rules applicable to classroom interaction to shift the focus from materials-driven lessons to those fostering a real language use in the classroom. In this way emerged Dogme's first commandment stating that teaching should be done using only the resources that teachers and students bring to the classroom and if there is a need for particular material, it should be decided where it can be found[2].

Dogme seeks to restore teaching to its pre-method "state of grace", as Thornburg refers to it, in the classroom affording not more than a chair, a whiteboard with markers, a teacher with the students, where learning is constructed out of the talk between the teacher and the learners. In his paper *Dogme: Dancer in the Dark?*[3] Thornbury suggests that the following key principles underlie Dogme in English language teaching:

1. Interactivity should be maintained among the learners and between the teacher and the learners.
2. Engagement in students increases when they create the content of the lesson.
3. Learning is social and dialogic.
4. Scaffolded conversations where the teacher and the learner co-construct their knowledge and skills support learning.
5. Language and grammar tend to emerge from learners' emerging communicative needs.
6. It is the teacher's role to optimize the language learning affordance through directing attention to emergent language.
7. The learners' choice is given recognition along with the learner's beliefs and knowledge.
8. Students and teachers are empowered by freeing the classroom of published resources and materials.
9. Relevance implies that all the materials used throughout the lesson should be relevant to the learners' needs.
10. Critical use means that teachers and students should make a critical use of published teaching materials.

Out of the aforementioned principles, three commandments inherent in a Dogme lesson stand out:

1. Dogme is about teaching that is conversation driven.

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[2] **Thornbury, S.** (2005). *Dancing in the Dark.* Retrieved from http://nebula. wsimg.com/22eaea86234146ac3105f57698b06b75?AccessKeyId=186A535D1BA4FC995A73&disposition=0&alloworigin=1 29 August, 2015.
[3] **Ibid.**

2. Dogme is about teaching that is materials light.
3. Dogme is about teaching the emergent language[4].

Among the several reasons that Dogme proponents list for Dogme to be conversation driven is that conversation occupies a key role in language learning due to its interactive and dialogic nature and that it promotes socialization and scaffolds learning. It is also important to note that despite its materials-light format, a Dogme-lesson does not necessarily exclude materials or any technology per se. What a Dogme approach rejects are those materials that do not conform to the guidelines provided above and stifle the opportunities for real communication instead of triggering it[5].

Dogme's focus on the emergent language underscores the notion that language learning is not really a question of acquisition but of emergence.

As a teaching philosophy, Dogme was criticized by some researchers and ELT professionals for the reasons ranging from the rejection of coursebooks and plans to imposing hard constraints on teachers.

J. Harmer in his blog[6] argues that learning takes place in the learner's brain and there is no guarantee that it happens 'here and now' as claimed by S. Thornbury. Harmer supports his argument by the fact that not all learners can process the language in the same way, and the pressure to speak imposed on the students by the teacher can seriously damage them.

There is also much controversy whether the principles themselves could be applied to all teachers. In his blog, Renshaw argues that the so-called prerequisite skill of being able to understand and pinpoint the emergent language is not inherent in many teachers and requires some time, intuition and knowledge. In this respect, Renshaw[7] suggests that Dogme should be used mostly by those experienced teachers who are already equipped to address the emergent language in the classroom. However, as the authors of Teaching Unplugged put it, "Dogme appreciates the role of non-native teachers who are capable of 'exploring and

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[4] **Meddings, L., & Thornbury, S.** *(2009). Teaching unplugged: Dogme in English language teaching. Peaslake: Delta Publishing, p. 8.*

[5] **Meddings, L., & Thornbury, S.** (*2009*). *Teaching Unplugged: Dogme in English Language Teaching. Peaslake: Delta Publishing, p. 12.*

[6] **Harmer, J.** (*2010*). *No Dogma for EFL – away from a Pedagogy of Essential Bareness. Retrieved from https://jeremyharmer.wordpress.com/2010/10/10 /no-dogma-for-efl-away-from-a-pedagogy-of-essential-bareness/ 28 August, 2015.*

[7] **Renshaw, J.** (*2010*). *Why I Teach Unplugged but Don't Do Dogme. Retrieved from http://jasonrenshaw.typepad.com/jason_renshaws_web_log/2010/10/why-i-teach-unplugged-but-dont-do-dogme.html 30 August, 2015.*

extending the learner's existing language capacity' because they can '...see the target language through the learners' eyes'.[8]

It is very difficult to describe a Dogme lesson given its context sensitivity. However, ELT professionals tend to agree that Dogme-type lessons range from heavy Dogme lessons to light ones. In the first type, learners generate the language without the teacher's interference, whereas in the second, the teacher gives the learners an idea for communication which in its turn leads to the language emergence. Accordingly, Meddings (2003)[9] distinguishes the following scales of depth for a Dogme lesson:

Punk Dogme   implies that anything live and local is more likely to appeal to learners than coursebooks or handouts. The idea of *Punk Dogme* is to create rather than consume.

Talk Dogme is all about increasing interaction time among the learners and between the learners and the teacher. The teacher encourages the learners to use details of everyday life, note the emergent language and scaffold the learners' language as required.

Deep Dogme underlies the basis of the whole lesson, during which both the teacher and learners record what has happened in the lesson and when the teacher explores the language with his/her learners.

Full Dogme encourages the learners to bring in their own materials with them. This means that nobody will know what the lesson will be about. The teacher both manages the interaction and monitors the language.

Dream Dogme implies the establishment of language schools, letting the learners organise themselves into classes based on their interests and making sure that teachers respond to the language that can come up in interaction.

In their book *Teaching Unplugged*, L. Meddings and S. Thornbury suggest the following provisional stages for a light Dogme lesson:

1. Set it up stage implies the teacher giving some kind of stimulus to the learners. It can be a small text the teacher dictates to the learners, a question, or a picture.
2. Let it run stage is the one during which the learners are actively engaged in interaction with each other or the teacher and the teacher makes note of the emergent language.
3. In Round it off stage, the teacher boards the emergent language he has noted and wants to focus on.

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[8] **Meddings, L., & Thornbury, S.** *(2009). Teaching Unplugged: Dogme in English Language Teaching. Peaslake: Delta Publishing, p. 84.*

[9] **Meddings, L.** (2003). *Dogme still Able to Divide ELT. Retrieved from* *http://www.theguardian.com/education/2003/apr/17/tefl.lukemeddings.*

Despite its reputation of being unconventional, Dogme seems to be the perfect answer to teaching students at my home University, where the resources are low both in materials and technology.

My first Dogme lesson was initiated by the experiment designated for a pre-intermediate group of learners attending a general English course in a language school in Tbilisi, Georgia. I had been teaching this particular group for about a month and knew that they liked communicating with each other and working in pairs. All the learners in the group voiced their need to improve their speaking skills and I thought a conversation-driven classroom would encourage them to talk about the real things they were interested in. By the time of the experiment, the learners had made use of a wide range of resources retrieved either from coursebooks or designed by the teacher.

The stimulus for the lesson was adapted from Meddings and Thornbury[10]. During the experiment, I did not make use of any materials, but post-its, the whiteboard and markers. The objectives underlying the experiment were built on the main Dogme commandments and ran as follows:

1. By the end of the lesson, I will have effectively dealt with the emergent language in the classroom. I will measure this objective based on the data collected from my peers and learners.
2. Based on my self-reflection and the feedback provided by my peers and learners, I will have identified if I can teach Dogme lessons in the future. I will do this by reflecting on the lesson overall.
3. During the lesson, I will be maximizing the interactivity between me and my learners and the learners themselves.
4. During the lesson, I won't be using any materials and will conduct the lesson based on the contributions of my learners.

To evaluate the success of the lesson overall, I did the audio-recording of the lesson for me to be able to assess the learners 'engagement in every stage and the effectiveness of my responses to the emergent language in the classroom (objectives 1 and 3). I also had two peers watch me and asked them to complete an observation task to decide whether my lesson was conducted in the format consistent with a Dogme-type lesson (objective 4).

Upon the completion of the lesson, I administered a student questionnaire where the learners anonymously answered questions related to my responses to their questions, their own learning experience in this lesson and whether they would like to have a similar lesson in the future (objectives 1-4).

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[10] **Meddings, L., & Thornbury, S**. (*2009*). *Teaching unplugged: Dogme in English Language Teaching. Peaslake: Delta Publishing, p. 32.*

As shown by post-experimental evaluation, the lesson itself was quite successful, as I could achieve all my objectives and discovered that Dogme-type lessons are quite engaging both for the learner and the teacher. My peers reported that the level of the learners' engagement was quite high, and the lesson itself was conversation-driven, materials-light and focused on the learners' emergent language. The learners themselves noted that one of the reasons that the lesson was good was that they talked a lot.

As we can see, Dogme is not about ignoring planning but encouraging teachers to reflect upon the lesson profoundly to be able to fully consider the emergent language. Though its regular use may seem challenging to some teachers in terms of assessment and curriculum design, occasional Dogme classes may add diversity to the teacher's performance in the classroom and make learning more targeted and engaging.

ՓՈՐՁԵՐ «ԴՈԳՄԵ» ՄԵԹՈԴԻ ՇՐՋԱՆԱԿՈՒՄ

ԲԵՔԱՐՅԱՆ Լ. Ա.

Ամփոփում

Օտար լեզու (մասնավորապես՝ անգլերեն) դասավանդելիս մենք հաճախ առաջնորդվում ենք դասագրքերում, մեթոդական ձեռնարկներում և ուսումնական ծրագրերում տեղ գտած նյութերով, սակայն հազվադեպ ենք մտածում այն մասին, թե որքանով են դրանք օգտակար ուսանողին: «Դոգմե» նոր՝ փորձարարական դասավանդման մեթոդի առանձնա-հատկություններից է լսարանում դասագրքերի և ուսումնական նյութերի բացակայությունը, որը դասախոսին հնարավորություն է ընձեռում լեզուն ուսուցանելու արդիական թեմաներ արծարծող անգլերեն զրույցների միջոցով, որոնք ոգևորում են օտար լեզուն ուսումնասիրողներին և արդյունավետություն հաղորդում դասընթացին:

ЭКСПЕРИМЕНТЫ В РАМКАХ МЕТОДА ''ДОГМЕ''

БЕКАРЯН Л. А.

Резюме

В преподавании иностранных языков (в частности, английского языка) мы часто руководствуемся материалами, содержащимся в учебниках, методических пособиях и учебных программах, редко задумываясь над тем, насколько эти материалы полезны для студентов. Анализ экспериментального метода ''Догме'', не предусматривающего использование учебников и учебных материалов, приводит к заключению, что названный метод позволяет преподавателю уделить больше времени общению со студентами; при этом обучение осуществляется посредством бесед на английском языке на современные и интересующие студентов темы.