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A Silver Lining: Metaphors Suggesting Professional Development through Emergency Online Language Teaching in Primary Education

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Abstract

The aim of this qualitative study was to investigate the way Hungarian primary language teachers coped with emergency remote teaching (ERT) introduced during the Covid-19 epidemic and the effects this mode of teaching exerted on their subsequent face-to-face teaching practice. While there are scores of studies written on the subject, hardly any have focussed on primary language education; hence our choice of the primary school sample. Out of a multi-item online questionnaire forwarded to all the primary schools in Hungary, we decided to focus on the last two items only, namely those which requested the 706 volunteering respondents to suggest two metaphors with concomitant brief explanations: one to describe their experiences of online teaching in 2020, and another one to specify the changes they perceived in their professional attitudes and competences by the time of administering the survey in 2022. The results demonstrate a decisively positive shift as the respondents realised that the digital expertise that they had gained during ERT would help them teach more effectively in the “real” classroom. The study also raises the issue of what educational authorities and teacher educators should do to promote digital education in pre- and in-service training.

Keywords: *Metaphor, Primary Language Teaching, Teacher Development, Online Teaching, Digital Competences*

Introduction

The unexpected shift to emergency remote teaching (ERT) caused by the COVID pandemic in 2020 was unprecedented and triggered changes never experienced before. Teachers of all subjects at every level of education faced a formidable challenge by being forced to teach remotely, in most cases online. Since then, scores of studies have been published about how

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teachers managed to cope, the new teaching practices they chose to employ and the way this situation affected them at a personal level.

The present study gives account of a survey that was carried out among primary language teachers in Hungary in 2022. Its overall aim was to shed light on the pedagogical after-effects of the ERT mode. ERT in the spring of 2020 and the remote periods afterwards posed not only a huge professional challenge, but also opened a path for professional development. It was hypothesized that while primary language teachers lacked in digital pedagogical competences before the quarantine-induced emergency situation, they would develop their IT skills in significant measure and simultaneously adapt their teaching methodology to the online environment. It was further presumed that the newly acquired competences would be integrated into the new, post-quarantine, in-person classroom situation. It was hoped that a new language teaching methodology which technologically savvy teachers applied would better serve the needs of young language learners in the 21st century.

The aim of this study is to investigate whether the experiences that primary language teachers had gathered during ERT had any effect on their subsequent face-to-face teaching methodology, and whether these experiences positively contributed to their professional development. In order to find an answer to this question, data was gathered through survey questions and metaphors. Both sets of data aimed to shed light on the teachers' ERT experience and on the way this experience affected their subsequent face-to-face classroom work.

In this mixed-methods study, more than seven hundred teachers (N=706) filled in a nationwide questionnaire. The quantitative data collected from the survey examined and compared the teachers' online practices during the first emergency period in the spring of 2020 with those during the subsequent waves of school closures. The last two items in the questionnaire invited the respondents to provide metaphors to describe their experiences about online education acquired during the first ERT period and at the time of the survey. It was hoped that through the metaphors a deeper understanding of the teachers' pedagogical views, attitudes and beliefs could be obtained. While taking a cursory glance at this large-scale project on the whole, this study essentially delimits its scope to an analysis of metaphors.

Literature Review

Emergency Remote Teaching

In the spring of 2020, the world experienced a sudden and unexpected change. Due to the measures induced by the Covid-19 pandemic, life regressed into a lockdown mode on a global level. Education was forced to operate online, which affected around 1.2 billion students worldwide (UNESCO, 2020). The transition was so quick that teachers felt "like a rug had been pulled from under you" (Kim & Asbury, 2020, p. 1075). While most of them resorted to some form of online teaching, in resource-poor schools teachers had to make do with traditional solutions, such as sending work packages for home study (Li & Lalani, 2020; Moser et al., 2021; Schleicher, 2020). Despite their lack of digital expertise, teachers were expected to adapt to the new situation to the best of their knowledge. However, this caused all the stakeholders of ERT, i.e., teachers, students and parents, to struggle with an increased level of stress (MacIntyre et al., 2020).

Online Education before and during ERT – and the Related Challenges

Online education had already been developing fast before Covid-19, mainly in the private and tertiary sectors. Some countries, like Germany, were even in the process of implementing digitalisation strategies in their public education system (Kalo et al., 2023). While many studies reported successful IT-enhanced teaching experiences (Anastasiades et al., 2010; Macrory et al., 2012; Schwirzke et al., 2018; Slaughter et al., 2019), the online shift that took place in the spring of 2020 vastly differed from planned online teaching previously applied; this was an emergency situation forced by the pandemic crisis, which gave no free choice for teachers whether they wished to participate or not (Hodges et al., 2020).

Scores of studies quickly followed one another with a focus on different layers of the educational sector, including adult education (Xu & Buckingham, 2024), public education (Feri et al., 2020; Kim & Asbury, 2020; Moser et al., 2021; Radloff et al., 2024; Wong & Moorhouse, 2021), higher education (Bond et al., 2021), foreign language education (Ekoc-Özcelik, 2022; Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021; Yan & Wang, 2022) and teacher training (Aldhaen, 2024; Baral et al., 2024; Fenyődi et al., 2021; Godhe, 2024). However, relatively few studies investigated early primary education (Nikolopoulou, 2022), let alone primary *language* education in general and the professional development of primary school teachers in particular.

The first studies on ERT reported that even though teachers did not feel trained for the task (e.g., Klusmann et al., 2022), wherever the circumstances allowed, ERT took place in a digital format. Since existing pedagogical models and principles for the effective implementation of digital education were in short supply, in their new mode of teaching most teachers had to go through the stages of trial, reflection, development and adjustment (Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021).

The Case for Professional Development

ERT brought to the surface school teachers' lack of digital skills and the need for further in- and pre-service training in this area (Moser et al., 2021). Somewhat surprisingly, it was found that the possession of digital skills had little to do with the teachers' age (Korkmaz & Akçay, 2024; Lannert & Hartai, 2021). Listed in the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (DCE), the specific digital competences for online education are grouped into three interconnected areas, namely Educators' Professional Competences, Educators' Pedagogical Competences and Learners' Competences (Redecker & Punie, 2017). With Pedagogical Competences placed in focus, this complex framework recognises and identifies the various phases in the teaching process: the selection, creation and modification of digital resources, assessment and learner empowerment. According to the DCE framework, the need for a subject specific technology education is a relevant claim for teachers of all school subjects (Gibson, 2008), including languages (Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021).

As for language teachers, studies have shown that while during the ERT phase teachers' previous digital experience correlated with more effective pedagogy (Moser et al., 2021), after the initial shock teachers' adaptability skills turned out to be a key factor in their online classroom practice (Wong & Moorhouse, 2021). Having acquired the basic digital skills, such as using online learning management systems and video applications (Zoom or Google Meet), language teachers were able to adapt their in-person teaching experience to deliver their classes in the new environment. They would not only attend professional development events held

online but would also seek opportunities to cater for their emotional/psychological well-being (Trust & Whalen, 2021). It was quickly realised that empathy and social-emotional training, as well as provision of emotional and psychological support were top priority issues.

Coping Strategies, Attitudes and Well-being

ERT affected language teachers not only in a professional sense, but also caused a great deal of stress, a decreased level of well-being and a surge of negative emotions. MacIntyre et al. (2020) carried out a survey with 600 language teachers to investigate stress and coping strategies. Examining the latter, the authors identified fourteen strategies, which were further grouped into approach and avoidant categories. They found that positive psychological outcomes correlated positively with approach, and negatively with avoidance. A later study by Macintyre et al. (2022) took a closer look at the role hope played in teachers' stress, coping strategies and well-being at the time of the first closures in April 2020 and then in November 2020. The results confirmed positive correlations between hope, successful coping and well-being. Trust and Whalen's study (2021) confirmed these results about coping, and their data seemed to prove that teachers relied on growth in several fields, including cognitive, social and affective areas.

Adaptation, Teacher Development and Teacher Needs

Dealing with the rapid conversion, teaching under unfamiliar circumstances, the lack of physical contact with the students and personal issues during the Covid-19 pandemic posed a multidimensional challenge. As mentioned above, teachers had to handle stress (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017), uncertainties, negative feelings and difficult family situations. Teacher beliefs about their roles are reported to be a key variable in their use of online technologies. Teachers with constructivist beliefs were found to use educational technology more frequently than their colleagues with transmissive beliefs about their role (Gao & Cui, 2022; Guillén-Gámez et al., 2024; Huang et al., 2023; Nikolopoulou, 2022). Similarly, teachers' pedagogical beliefs influenced their ERT practices. Suarez and McGrath (2022) argued that during the learning and adaptation process teachers' professional identity was reconstructed. The results of the learning process are also reflected in the shift of their feelings about online teaching. As they started to experience success, their negative attitude gradually turned into a more positive one (Nikolopoulou, 2022), even fondness and attachment (Huang et al., 2023), although high levels of stress may have remained (Kalo et al., 2023).

Teachers, students and parents were quickly reminded that "School is more than just a place to learn, school is where social-emotional learning takes place" (Klusmann et al., 2022, p. 7). Teachers wanted smaller classes, one-to-one contact with students so that they could look after their well-being. A study in Scotland reported that primary teachers' three main areas for concern were meeting learners' needs, influencing their engagement in online learning and the impact of ERT on their own professional lives (Beattie et al., 2022). Language teachers especially missed the physical space in their classrooms and the human contacts necessary for facilitating human interaction between the students and themselves (Guillén et al., 2020).

Gradually, as teachers were undergoing digital transformation, they enhanced their digital culture, and gradually built up their digital toolkits, which they were able to transfer into their post-pandemic face-to-face teaching (Nikolopoulou, 2022; Szabó et al., 2021; UNESCO,

2020). The significance of digital literacy became more relevant after returning to “real” classroom teaching (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2020; Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021).

Metaphors in Educational Research

In their seminal work Lakoff and Johnson (1980) claimed that metaphors are tools of verbal expressions, which humans live by and are an essential tool or problem-solving device that can be applicable in language learning and teaching as well. According to Tannen’s (1989) interpretation, metaphors are images “painted” with words to which socially shared meanings are attached. Cameron (1999) called a metaphor a mental phenomenon, which is cognitive in its nature and is the interaction between the mental and the linguistic. Kövecses (2017) defined the conceptual metaphor as “understanding one domain of experience (that is typically abstract) in terms of another (that is typically concrete)” (p. 1). He further elaborated that in the conceptual metaphor theory the source domain is concrete, while the target one is abstract: the concrete domain maps the abstract one.

Metaphors have been increasingly used in research on language teaching and learning as well (Oxford et al., 1998), such as on language itself (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999), language learning beliefs (Kramsch, 2003), the teacher (Farrell, 2022; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2008) and even online teaching (Ligorio et al., 2016). Oxford (2001) argued that curriculum theories could be simplified through metaphors, which would help to illuminate the relationship between abstract concepts and more visible ones. They could uncover the meanings behind the conscious mind and, therefore, L2 research has used metaphor analysis in order to understand teachers’ beliefs (de Guerrero & Villamil, 2002; Oxford, 2001). This notion is confirmed by Johnston (1992), who noted that prior beliefs could be made explicit with the help of metaphors. Creating metaphors is a complex process requiring reflection, but can thus lead to a deeper understanding of attitudes and beliefs. This study conducts metaphor analysis in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of ERT on primary language teachers’ methodology.

The Study

The present study examines the extent to which primary language teachers are able to reflect on and process their new digital experiences, adjust their teaching methodology and use the lessons learnt in the “virtual” classroom upon their return to the “real” classroom. Since there is a dearth of studies that focus on how primary teachers coped in the ERT situation, this study focusses on the primary teachers’ attitudes, beliefs and practices. Data was obtained from a questionnaire circulated among primary language teachers in Hungary. Out of a total of 39 questionnaire items, we decided to focus on only the last two items in this paper, namely those which inquired about the metaphors that the respondents thought would best describe their experiences during those challenging periods. The data obtained for these two items were subjected to a qualitative analysis. With this in mind, the following research question was formulated:

RQ: Does the metaphor analysis support the assumption that emergency remote teaching positively affected the subsequent face-to-face teaching competences of primary language teachers?

Respondents and Context

In the spring of 2022, a questionnaire was distributed online to all Hungarian primary schools (N=2487) registered in the officially available databases. With 706 questionnaires filled in, the return rate was around 28%. As shown in Table 1, the majority of the respondents, 71,2% and 18,3%, worked in state and church schools, respectively. They were evenly distributed across the country and the types of settlement they lived in. While the proportion of unqualified teachers was negligible (0,6%), general language teachers (61,7%) constituted the largest group, followed by primary language specialists (25,1%) and primary minority (7,4%) or minority language teachers (2,9%). Most of the respondents specialised in English (64,2%), German (21,4%) or German as a minority language (12,7%). The number of teachers with more than twenty years of experience amounted to nearly half of the population (44,3%). Participation in the survey was voluntary, and it was stipulated that the respondents' identity should not be revealed. Before the questionnaire was circulated, Eötvös Loránd University Budapest sanctioned a research permit (KE 2022/005.).

The Metaphor Analysis

As pointed out above, the last two items of the questionnaire invited the respondents to illustrate their online experiences by suggesting two metaphors. Whereas the first metaphor referred to their impressions on online teaching during ERT (“At the beginning, online teaching was like a ..., because”), the second was meant to describe their impressions about online teaching once they had returned to face-to-face teaching (“By now, online teaching is like a ..., because”). In addition, the respondents were requested to give an explanation for each of their choices for the purpose of helping researchers to clarify the meanings of metaphors during the data analysis process.

The rationale for this metaphor elicitation technique was twofold. On the one hand, it was hoped that through metaphors the respondents would provide a deeper insight into their beliefs in and attitudes to online teaching. On the other hand, it was assumed that the metaphors could supplement and confirm or refute the quantitative data about online teaching gained from the questionnaire.

The data bank was systematically processed by means of a categorisation technique – a combination of methods that Armstrong et al. (2011) (“Metaphor checking”) and Cameron and Low (1999) (“Generalizing from the collected metaphors”) employed. This task turned out to be particularly complicated due to the high number of metaphors offered by the respondents: altogether 499 and 442 metaphors were identified for two questionnaire items, respectively.

The steps of the data analysis are listed below:

1. Metaphor checking with the help of the explanations that the respondents provided: due to the polysemic nature of metaphors, explanations were indispensable in clarifying the meanings of metaphors and they played a key role in the process of categorisation.
2. Generalizing and determining emergent categories, identifying source and target domains.
3. Labelling and sorting the metaphors.
4. Ensuring the reliability of the categorisation through the employment of a second evaluator: differences between the evaluators were resolved through discussions.
5. Setting up conceptual categories and limiting their number to ten.

6. Splitting each category into complementing positive and negative aspects.

Table 1*Demographic Data*

School type	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
State school	503	71.2
Minority language school	20	2.8
University practice school	13	1.8
Church owned	129	18.3
Private	9	1.3
Foundation owned	30	4.2
Other	2	0.3
Total	706	100
Settlement type	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Capital	149	21.1
Big city (100,000-1 million)	86	12.2
Medium city (20,000-100,000)	184	26.1
Small town (5,000-20,000)	138	19.5
Village (>5,000)	149	21.1
Total	706	100,0
Qualification	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Primary language teacher	196	25.1
Primary minority language teacher	58	7.4
Minority language teacher	23	2.9
Language teacher	482	61.7
No qualification	5	0.6
Other	17	2.2
Total	781	100,0
Language	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
English as a foreign language	453	64.2
German as a foreign language	151	21.4
German as a minority language	90	12.7
Other	12	1.7
Total	706	100,0
Work experience	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
1-3 years	66	9.3
4-9 years	130	18.4
10-20 years	197	27.9
20+ years	313	44.3
Total	706	100.0

Results and Discussion

In view of the large number of metaphors provided by the respondents, the researchers grouped them under ten comprehensive categories to facilitate the process of analysis. Each category was then divided into two sub-categories: one that contained metaphors with negative and one with positive connotations. As not all the respondents were teachers of English, the metaphors were to be provided in Hungarian, waiting to be translated by the research team.

Table 2 demonstrates the frequency of occurrence of negative versus positive metaphors in the two phases of teaching: during-ERT (Column 1) versus after-ERT (Column 2). The first line (odd numbers) in each category always contains the negative metaphors, whereas the

second line (even numbers) the positive ones. Instead of analysing each category and sub-category in depth, only those mentioned most frequently were examined.

Table 2*Categorisation of Metaphors*

Metaphors: Categories	During- ERT	499	After- ERT	442
A. Autonomy				
1. Pressure, punishment, survival	45	50	20	28
2. Freedom, break, holiday	5		8	
B. Task or experience				
3. Work-related daunting task	32	59	29	63
4. Positive experience: adventure, fun, joy	27		34	
C. Novelty, professional development				
5. Negative attitude, rejection	4	20	6	102
6. Acceptance, alternative, new opportunity	16		96	
D. Upward and downward movement				
7. Depth, downward movement	40	46	2	15
8. Surface, height, upward movement	6		13	
E. System of colours				
9. Dark, black, misty	55	57	2	15
10. Light, colourful and transparent	2		13	
F. Unknown acquaintance				
11. Unknown, distant, frightful	57	57	5	34
12. Familiar, close, safe	0		29	
G. System, organisation				
13. Chaos	55	55	5	34
14. Order	0		29	
H. Feasibility:				
15. Mission impossible, unsolvable	31	31	8	125
16. Routine, natural	0		117	
I. Dream, story				
17. Nightmare, monster-like	98	102	27	36
18. Dream, memory	4		9	
J. Emotional impression				
19. Negative	22	22	6	13
20. Positive	0		20	
Total:		Negative: 439/88%	Negative: 109/25%	
		Positive: 60/12%	Positive: 333/75%	

As for the during-ERT phase (Column 1), a total of 499 metaphors were counted. Among them, Category I (Dream, story) with 102 metaphors constitutes the largest category. The proportion of negative metaphors, most commonly formulated as a nightmare, was overwhelming (98 versus 4). The respondents attributed this negativism to the lack of expertise in online teaching, the insufficiency of professional support given by the employers and time constraints. The respondents' plight was exacerbated by a high level of stress and a feeling of uncertainty and abandonment. What distressed them even more was that they had to provide guidance to parents about how to cope with digitally guided education: a typical case of the blind leading the blind. In contrast, merely four respondents expressed a more positive, dream-like view, pointing out that this new teaching mode offered them opportunities, more flexible working hours and fewer discipline problems. Or as a respondent said: "When someone misbehaved, I simply turned off their microphone and we carried on with the lesson."

Category B (Task or experience) with 59 metaphors turned out to be the second most frequently referred to category, but here the positive and negative attitudes essentially balanced each other out with a slight tilt towards the negative pole (32 versus 27). Those for whom the experience was painful referred to ERT as some kind of examination, a hard nut to crack, an overloaded fast train, or a pain in the neck. The optimists on the other hand came up with colourful and dynamic metaphors: ERT was an adventure or a rollercoaster. The diversity and multitude of opportunities were reflected in metaphors such as a smorgasbord, all the cakes on a bakery shelf and a beehive. One respondent went as far as comparing ERT to a cold shower, which freshened them up from professional boredom.

The third most frequently mentioned category was Category E (System of colours), in which the respondents described their experiences by using colours. The negative metaphors were in vast majority (55 out of 57). While black was a recurring colour, one respondent mentioned misty purple. Several respondents likened their impressions of ERT to wandering in a thick forest or jungle, or being locked in a hole with no exit in sight. One respondent said teaching online was like walking in a dark corridor unable to find the light switch, while another one compared this experience to a discovery trip through the night, and yet another: “It was dark because I did not ask the children to turn on their cameras.” Light colours surfaced only in a couple of metaphors; one optimist described their experience in the form of a white board which gradually filled up with content as a result of learning and routine.

There was a preponderance of negative metaphors in the remaining seven categories, too. To give a few typical examples: leap into the unknown, lack of order, confusion of Babel, paint jars knocked over, mixed salad, loss of autonomy, slavery. Someone compared the online world to an injured bird bereft of the power of flying, adding that the classroom was the place where both teachers and learners were comfortable and inspired. Another respondent confessed that they felt as if they were C-3PO and R2D2 from the movie Star Wars embodied in one person. The explanations accompanying the metaphors revealed that the lack of direction, the unforeseeable future and the time-consuming nature of their task were major concerns. Several respondents remarked that online teaching deprived them of non-verbal communication whereas others complained that while they were subject to frequent criticism from parents, they were given no constructive feedback on their work.

The 442 metaphors referred to in the after-ERT column (Column 2) describe the respondents' judgment of online teaching at the time of filling in the questionnaire in 2022. Here the metaphors in Category H (Feasibility) were found the most popular with 125 answers. While a small number of respondents still regarded online teaching as dancing with their legs tied, the majority (117 versus 8) seem to have taken a positive view, considering online teaching a feasible alternative. They described the new experience as part of a routine that can be easily picked up again after a break. Online teaching was compared to a multiplication table, cycling, cooking, a comfortable dress or car, a familiar piece of furniture, a well-oiled machine, a locomotive engine on the rails and even to a cup of morning coffee.

The second most popular category in this column, Category C (Novelty, professional development) with 102 metaphors, demonstrated that the teachers accepted the status quo rather than rejecting online teaching. The positive metaphors (96) suggested that online teaching offered plenty of opportunities: a path waiting to be explored, a rucksack, a bottomless bag, a gold mine, a well-equipped kitchen, a huge building and a lake with secrets. These

metaphors demonstrated the richness of the new resources made available by ERT. One of the few negative metaphors compared online teaching to a deserted park better to be avoided.

In Category B (Task or experience), which turned out to be the third most populous group of metaphors, there is a roughly equal distribution between the negative and positive answers (32 versus 27, respectively). While a rather high number of respondents regarded online teaching as a necessary evil, the positive metaphors reflected the teachers' growing confidence. At the time of administering the survey in 2022, online teaching was associated with pleasant memories; adjectives such as sweet, colourful and enjoyable were often mentioned together with similarly affirmative nouns such as cakes, Paradise, games, a rainbow, a pyjama party, a Netflix series, or a marshmallow. Some of the metaphors implied difficulties which could easily be overcome and turned into a favourable outcome, like when one sails or visits an adventure park or a fitness centre.

All in all, 88% of the metaphors describing online teaching during ERT had negative connotations as opposed to a mere 12% that rather expressed a positive attitude. However, an entirely different picture emerged when metaphor use in 2022 was examined. The ratio was dramatically reversed: the number of negative metaphors dropped to 25% as opposed to 75% in the positive spectrum.

The overwhelming initial rejection and strong negative emotions expressed through the metaphors coincide with the findings of research in other countries, as reported in the literature review above. Online teaching before Covid was typically practiced in the private and adult language teaching sectors, much less so in the system of public education. Before the Covid-19 epidemic most school teachers were not in a pressing need to integrate digital elements into their classroom practice and thus their digital competences may well have been wanting. This assumption is supposed to apply to the ranks of primary teachers in particular. What may be said with a high degree of certainty is that foreign language teachers working in Hungarian primary schools felt extremely vulnerable at the onset of ERT. Since the switch was unexpected and rapid, many of them found themselves in a state of shock. As an opportunity for professional training and support was slow to come by, a feeling of uncertainty and a sense of abandonment among the respondents prevailed for months.

On the other hand, our survey seems to indicate that the majority of the respondents were capable of adapting to the emergency situation. Those who were willing to take on the challenge even recognised the opportunities that the digital world had to offer to language education. It seems reasonable to assume that those who had constructivist beliefs and a positive mindset were more likely to consider ERT as an opening for professional development. In fact, metaphors in our data bank frequently referred to the richness of opportunities that digital resources could offer. Those who had mastered digital pedagogy could now confidently apply its techniques in the classroom.

Our survey results indicate that in a matter of two years the respondents' attitude towards online teaching underwent some kind of metamorphosis. Paradoxically, the circumstances compelled by the Covid-19 epidemic forced them to acquire digital competences on their own – a long overdue development. The explanations next to the metaphors confirmed that their professional confidence had grown and their sense of orientation in the digital world had markedly improved. Some of the respondents reported that during their adaptation process they had been consciously revising their teaching methods. There seems to be general agreement

that, thanks to the ERT experience, they became better informed about the difference between going fully online and fitting certain digital elements into their daily routine. Perhaps even more importantly, it was repeatedly mentioned that, alongside their teachers, the students had also grown accustomed to the presence of digital tools in the classroom. It goes without saying that these newly acquired skills will come in useful for their out-of-school life as well.

In sum, we daresay that the metaphor analysis yielded an affirmative answer to the research question we posed: ERT did indeed exert a predominantly positive effect on the respondents' teaching methodology once they returned from the "virtual" classroom into the "real" one.

Conclusion

In light of the metaphor analysis most of the respondents claimed that they had undergone a massive professional transformation triggered by the ERT mode which had been imposed upon them during the recurring phases of the Covid-19 epidemic. While before 2020 they had little knowledge about online teaching, if any at all, and also about the pedagogical and technological expertise this form of teaching required, by 2022 most of the primary teachers in the survey reported that their attitudes towards online teaching had taken a positive turn and their repertoire for adopting elements of ERT into their face-to-face classroom work had expanded.

The job that the researchers of this study did not examine was what exactly the respondents had managed to transfer from their online experience and in what way they had been able to harness this newly-acquired knowledge after the return to "normalcy". Nor did we look into the details of whether this "hybrid" form of teaching created after ERT had succeeded in fostering the learning process, especially that of children in primary schools. As a matter of fact, some teachers in our survey alerted to the dangers that online teaching and the overuse of technology in primary education might cause.

Another concern the metaphor analysis did not articulate in detail had to do with the availability of up-to-date gadgets, or rather the lack thereof, that are indispensable tools for both online and face-to-face teaching these days. Have schools in Hungary – or anywhere else, for that matter – become technologically better equipped in the wake of the Covid epidemic? Are they better prepared for difficult circumstances looming large?

But perhaps most importantly, a note about the issue of teacher preparation. The present survey demonstrated that language teachers had been ill-prepared for the dramatic situation that they found themselves in when ERT had to be introduced overnight. In full awareness of the possibility of such eventualities in the future too, have courses for the development of digital competences been incorporated into the curriculum of pre-service training programmes for language teachers? In a similar vein, since digital competences are known to become outdated with meteoric speed, in-service training opportunities should be held for teachers to keep abreast with the advancement of technology and adapt their methodological know-how accordingly. Have the necessary conditions been created for this to take place? All the questions and issues raised above are waiting to be addressed by future research. Finally, the results of our study unequivocally demonstrated that teachers are capable of continuing professional development even in dire situations, such as the one caused by the sudden closure of schools. The respondents in this survey seem to have succeeded in keeping afloat with hardly any outside support too. Their perseverance and resourcefulness confirm our belief that positive

attitudinal change may sometimes be born out of hardship – or as one respondent remarked: “Every cloud has a silver lining”.

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Ethics Declarations

Competing Interests

No, there are no conflicting interests.

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