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Implementing the Action-Oriented Approach: Enhancing English Language Teaching in Croatia through Scenarios

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The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has significantly influenced language teaching, emphasizing an action-oriented approach that views learners as social agents performing meaningful tasks in real-world contexts. The CEFR Companion Volume (CV) expands on this approach, introducing concepts such as mediation and plurilingual competences while refining existing descriptors. Central to the action-oriented approach is the use of scenarios designed through backward design, aligning with learner outcomes. This paper explores the implementation of the action-oriented approach in English language teaching in Croatia. It aims to familiarize teachers with its principles and demonstrate its compatibility with existing programs. Rather than reporting empirical findings, the paper provides a pedagogically oriented overview intended to support teachers in understanding the action-oriented approach and applying it through classroom-ready scenarios. Specifically, it presents scenarios created by Croatian English language teachers based on outcomes from the national curriculum. The study outlines the CEFR, CEFR CV, the action-oriented approach, and the Croatian English language curriculum, followed by a presentation of the scenarios. The findings highlight practical applications of the approach while addressing challenges and limitations, offering insights into enhancing English language education in Croatia.

Keywords: CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), action-oriented approach, CEFR Companion Volume (CV), English language teaching, English language curriculum, scenarios

1. INTRODUCTION

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has been one of the most influential documents in language teaching both in Europe and worldwide. The CEFR 2001 not only provides descriptors for language learning but also promotes an action-oriented approach to language teaching (Council of Europe, 2001). The new CEFR Companion Volume (CV) elaborates on existing descriptors, as well as on key notions introduced in the CEFR 2001 version, including the action-oriented approach, mediation, and plurilingual and pluricultural competences (Council of Europe, 2020). The action-oriented approach focuses on viewing learners as social agents who use language to perform meaningful tasks in real-world contexts (North, 2022). Moreover, learners develop language competences and exercise their agency by collaborating with their peers in authentic tasks (Piccardo, 2022). Action-oriented tasks involve the use of scenarios that require learners to use all their cognitive, emotional, and social skills to reach a goal (Piccardo & North, 2019). Using backward design, scenarios are created based on descriptors or learner outcomes that can be found in the CEFR, the CEFR CV, and national curricula (Townend et al., 2022).

There is a need to keep abreast of current trends in the English language teaching world and attempt to integrate them into existing programs. Considering the importance given to the action-oriented approach in the CEFR CV, the question remains as to how it can be implemented in various contexts. Specifically, how can English language teachers in Croatia apply this approach in their teaching? The aim of this paper was to help improve educational practices in English language teaching in Croatia by, firstly, introducing language teachers to the basic characteristics of the action-oriented approach and, secondly, to show that it can be readily used along with the present curriculum. In particular, it will present several scenarios created by Croatian English language teachers based on learner outcomes from the Croatian English language curriculum. It is hoped that this paper will stimulate discussion and implementation of an important approach to language learning and teaching.

Firstly, an outline of the CEFR and the CEFR CV is provided, followed by an explanation of the action-oriented approach. A brief outline of the Croatian English Language Curriculum is then given. Subsequently, the results of the scenarios are presented, followed by a brief discussion and conclusion. Challenges and limitations are also considered.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

The major aim of the CEFR was to create a guideline for methods of learning, teaching, and assessing that could inform language syllabi, curriculum guidelines, examinations, and textbooks across Europe (Council of Europe, 2001). In the CEFR, the view of language use and learning is based on learners developing general and communicative language competences. General competences refer to learners' knowledge, skills, and their overall ability to learn. On the other hand, communicative language competences consist of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic competences as related to language learning. The basic approach in the CEFR is the idea that the communicative language competence of the language learner or user is engaged through various language *activities*, which include reception (listening and reading), production (spoken and written), interaction (spoken and written), or mediation (interpreting or translating). Each of these activities can involve texts that are either spoken or written, or a combination of both. The CEFR contextualizes these language activities within *domains*, including the public domain, the personal domain, the educational domain, and the occupational domain. Moreover, in the CEFR, communication and learning entail carrying out *tasks*, including language activities, as well as activities that go beyond mere language tasks. The CEFR suggests that since these tasks are not routine or automatic, they necessitate the application of *strategies* for effective communication and learning. What is more, since these tasks involve language activities, they require the processing of oral or written *texts* through reception, production, interaction, or mediation. In addition, the CEFR describes degrees of competence (learner proficiency) in the different domains in six Common Reference Levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2). Each Common Reference Level provides 'can do' descriptions of what a learner should be able to do while reading, listening, speaking, and writing in the target language. These descriptors can be used for any European language. In the final chapter, the CEFR offers guidelines for assessment of language proficiency (Council of Europe, 2001).

There are several other elements that are important to mention when describing the CEFR, including the promotion of mediation, plurilingual and pluricultural competences, as well as the action-oriented approach to language learning and teaching. First of all, the CEFR suggests that a learner's communicative language competence can be improved by carrying out

different language activities, entailing reception, production, interaction, or mediation. These activities involve texts, either oral, written, or both. When engaged in written or oral activities, mediation plays an important role in enabling communication among individuals who cannot directly communicate with one another. Mediation involves the use of strategies to aid understanding in communication, such as translation, paraphrasing, summarizing, or reformulation of texts. In other words, mediation involves the individual acting as an intermediary between a text in various language activities to enable the co-interlocutor to understand the intended meaning (Council of Europe, 2001).

In addition, the CEFR encourages the concept of plurilingualism. It suggests that this is different from multilingualism, which can be defined as a knowledge of numerous languages or the recognition of several official languages in a country. Plurilingualism implies going beyond an individual's home language to that of society in general, along with an understanding of other languages. That is, an individual's communicative competence entails the use of numerous languages and the ability to apply this knowledge interchangeably into an integrated repertoire to maintain successful communication. Moreover, there is a close relationship between plurilingualism and pluricultural competence, which enables learners to interact with others in various cultural contexts. These terms together are defined as "the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social agent has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 168). The two concepts are intricately connected and are viewed as having a single, complex skill set that users can utilize.

The CEFR also suggests an action approach to language learning. Namely, the language learner is viewed as a social agent who uses language to communicate in real-world situations by collaborating with others to create and mediate meaning through tasks. It suggests that languages can be considered as tools for obtaining and exchanging information, as well as for interpreting the world and for developing personal and collective knowledge by means of interaction and dialogue. As a result, learning a language is both a cognitive and social endeavor that incorporates everyday communication. In sum, it states that "The action-based approach therefore also takes into account the cognitive, emotional and volitional resources and the full range of abilities specific to and applied by the individual as a social agent" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 9).

2.2. The New CEFR Companion Volume (2020)

Despite the introduction of a wide range of concepts in the CEFR, North (2022) has suggested that certain aspects of the CEFR were misconstrued or ignored. This included concepts related to the action-oriented approach, mediation, and plurilingualism. Costa (2007) proposed that users of the CEFR mainly focused on the levels and descriptors that were applied to various teaching contexts. According to North (2022), an exception can be found among French scholars (Bourguignon, 2010, Puren, 2009, and Richer, 2009), who made a clear distinction between the action-oriented approach and the communicative approach, emphasizing agency and self-regulation in the former. In the English-speaking world, the CEFR was broadly used to augment curricula for communicative language teaching by means of its 'can do' descriptors. However, a central idea in the action-oriented approach, including the concept of learners as social agents, was largely neglected in English language publications (North, 2022). In addition, after the CEFR was published in 2001, discussions centered on learner autonomy rather than agency. Regrettably, this concept of autonomy was often oversimplified (Schmenk, 2008).

Furthermore, in the CEFR mediation or mediated activities suggested that the learner act as an intermediary between speakers when there is a communication breakdown. This involved activities such as translating, summarizing, or paraphrasing. This interpretation was embraced in Germany (Kolb, 2016; Reiman, Rössler, 2013) and Greece (Dendrinou, 2006; Stathopoulou, 2015). Nevertheless, North (2020) argues that this view of mediation is quite limited. According to Kolb (2016), rather than providing a genuine setting, the context of many of the language tasks is underdeveloped, and they simply lead the learner to summarize. In addition, when learners are asked to act as intermediaries, these tasks usually involve individual writing tasks or gapped dialogues. Moreover, the concept of plurilingual teaching as proposed by the CEFR did not develop as a subject of inquiry among researchers, apart from scholars in France (Auger, 2005). According to North (2022), this changed somewhat during the pluri-multilingual turn from 2012-2015 (Conteh & Meier, 2014; Piccardo & Puzos, 2015; Taylor & Snodden, 2013). However, Piccardo et al. (2022) have suggested that in many of these cases, the differences between plurilingualism and multilingualism were mainly disregarded.

The new CEFR Companion Volume (CV) was introduced in 2020 with the aim of updating the CEFR, while maintaining the conceptual frame-

work of the 2001 version. It provides new descriptors which present a wider selection of communicative activities, including online interaction, mediation, plurilingual and pluricultural competence, and sign language skills. In brief, it extends various CEFR constructs such as mediation, plurilingualism, as well as the action-oriented approach. The concept of mediation is expanded and encompasses both cognitive and relational features as proposed by Coste and Cavalli (2015). Cognitive mediation involves the learner being able to aid in accessing knowledge with an interlocutor, while relational mediation focuses on building interpersonal relationships. In other words, this view of mediation reinforces that language learning involves not only developing individual proficiency but also includes the idea of connecting with others. The descriptors in the CEFR CV thus present both mediation activities and mediation strategies that learners need to develop. Mediation activities consist of the sub-categories of mediating a text, mediating concepts (by collaborating in a group or leading group work), and mediating communication. On the other hand, mediation strategies involve strategies to explain a new concept and strategies to simplify a text (Council of Europe, 2020).

The concepts of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism are also expanded in the CEFR CV by providing explicit descriptors for these competences. The descriptors offer a detailed framework that helps in understanding how individuals use numerous languages and cultures in real-world contexts. The CEFR CV encourages an integrated view of an individual's distinct language repertoire by which they use all their linguistic and cultural backgrounds in communication. The volume suggests that plurilingual and pluricultural competence involves several elements and includes descriptors such as the following: building on pluricultural repertoire and plurilingual comprehension (Council of Europe, 2020). The new CV also expands the action-oriented approach, which will be described in more detail below.

2.3. The Action-Oriented Approach

The action-oriented approach is introduced in the CEFR CV in the following manner:

The CEFR's action-oriented approach represents a shift away from syllabuses based on a linear progression through language structures, or a pre-determined set of notions and functions, towards syllabuses based on needs analysis, oriented towards real-life tasks and constructed around purposefully selected notions and func-

tions. This promotes a “proficiency” perspective guided by “can do” descriptors rather than a “deficiency” perspective focusing on what the learners have not yet acquired (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 28).

The teaching and learning process in the action-oriented approach is guided by action at two levels. Firstly, the CEFR CV can aid in curriculum and course planning, which entails planning backwards (backward design) from learners’ real-life communicative needs (what the learner needs to be able to do in the language). Secondly, action is an integral part of its practical implementation in the classroom, which involves purposeful, collaborative tasks (Council of Europe, 2020).

In the action-oriented approach, the learner is viewed as “acting in the social world and exerting agency in the learning process” (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 22). The classroom is seen as a genuine social environment where students learn to co-construct content and communicate in collaborative tasks, rather than just receive passive knowledge. The learner is considered a social agent because they exercise their agency within a particular social context, facing defined situations that enforce conditions and limitations, which in turn foster creativity. Within the confines of these constraints, the social agent must mobilize their cognitive, emotional, linguistic, and cultural resources and, through recursive processes to plan, achieve results, and monitor their actions. By participating in these tasks, the learner’s competences and strategies are developed.

Seeing learners as social agents implies involving them in the learning process, possibly with descriptors as a means of communication. It also implies recognising the social nature of language learning and language use, namely the interaction between the social and the individual in the process of learning. Seeing learners as language users implies extensive use of the target language in the classroom – learning to use the language rather than just learning about the language (as a subject). Seeing learners as plurilingual, pluricultural beings means allowing them to use all their linguistic resources when necessary, encouraging them to see similarities and regularities as well as differences between languages and cultures (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 30).

In brief, in the CEFR CV, the action-oriented approach emphasizes the view of the learner as a social agent who co-constructs meaning in interaction through mediation, plurilingual, and pluricultural competences.

2.3.1. Characteristics of the action-oriented approach

According to North (2022), the main features of the action-oriented approach are affordances, agency, and tasks. Affordances are central to the action-oriented approach described in the CEFR CV as they highlight the opportunities available for language learners to interact meaningfully with their surroundings. In other words, they are “opportunities for action” with the environment (Käufer & Chemero, 2015, p. 166). The action-oriented approach helps learners identify and make the most of the opportunities available in their social and learning contexts (North, 2020). Affordances are often realized through collaborative tasks, where learners interact with peers, share ideas, and negotiate meaning. These tasks create a dynamic environment where learners can practice language use in context, helping them develop their communicative competence (North, 2022). From an ecological perspective, language learning is perceived as a process driven by agency where learners actively respond to the affordances available in diverse environments. This view emphasizes how context and interaction play an important role in shaping the experiences of language learners. Piccardo and North (2019) suggest that learners, as social agents, should be given the opportunity to experience a broad range of affordances in collaborative tasks and projects. Moreover, the CEFR CV emphasizes the importance of integrating various competences, skills, and resources within the context of social language use. This broader perspective enables learners to take advantage of diverse affordances, including cognitive, emotional, linguistic, and cultural affordances, to improve their learning outcomes. In sum, affordances in the action-oriented approach promote a more interactive and contextualized form of language learning, giving learners the opportunity to actively engage with their surroundings and effectively develop their language skills (North, 2022).

Another key feature of the action-oriented approach is the concept of agency, which is closely related to the view of the learner as a social agent (Council of Europe, 2020). In the CEFR CV, emphasis is placed on the idea that the learner needs to be given the opportunity to exercise their agency in the learning process. Brown and Lee (2015, p. 84) define agency as the “... ability of learners to make choices, take control, self-regulate, and thereby pursue their goals as individuals within a sociocultural context.” In the action-oriented approach, learner agency is characterized by autonomy, collaboration, reflection, and the application of language skills in meaningful contexts (Council of Europe, 2020). Taking its lead from a so-

cio-constructionist or sociocultural perspective, learners are perceived as agents who “actively engage in constructing the terms and conditions of their own learning” (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 145). Moreover, the view of agency is also informed by current second language research on agency. Within this complex construct, individuals are regarded as proactive agents capable of shaping their environment, rather than simply reacting to it. This relationship is characterized by a continuous cycle of mutual influence between the individual and their social context (Mercer, 2011). From this perspective, agency encompasses social, environmental, as well as individual elements.

As social agents, language learners can exercise their agency through collaborative tasks. In the action-oriented approach, the classroom becomes a setting for using authentic, real-life language that goes beyond its physical boundaries through projects and online resources (Council of Europe, 2020). Tasks play a crucial role in guiding teaching, learning, and assessment by providing learners with the opportunity to learn in real contexts. Acting as social agents, learners engage with and enhance the strategies and skills that are needed to accomplish these tasks, with teachers providing support when necessary. Furthermore, these action-oriented tasks often involve the creation of tangible products or outcomes, for example, “planning an outing, making a poster, creating a blog, designing a festival or choosing a candidate” (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 30). Thus, the main aim of these tasks is to achieve a clear goal, with language learning taking a secondary role: “Above all, the action-oriented approach implies purposeful, collaborative tasks in the classroom, *the primary focus of which is not language*” (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 30). While carrying out action-oriented tasks, learners collaborate and support each other’s progress, make choices, and think strategically about their actions (Hunter et al., 2019).

However, researchers who contributed to the development of the CEFR CV make a distinction between tasks in the action-oriented approach and task-based language teaching (TBLT). The key difference from TBLT lies in two main aspects: the complexity and richness of the tasks in the action-oriented approach, which offer a “landscape of affordances,” and the significant level of learner agency (North, 2022, p. 14). Moreover, in the action-oriented approach, the roles of both learners and teachers shift. Tasks take the form of projects that learners design and manage themselves. Acting as social agents, learners take responsibility for their work, shaping and organizing their activities while collaborating and problem-solving within real-life-like conditions and constraints. The role of teachers is similar to

that of a mentor, whereby they monitor progress and provide support when needed (North, 2022). It is important to note that the action-oriented approach is different from project-based approaches, such that the former focuses on learners accomplishing meaningful, real-world tasks as social agents, while project-based approaches center on extended, inquiry-driven projects that integrate multiple tasks that are based on broader, usually teacher-created criteria. Furthermore, because learners engage in completing authentic, real-world, and relevant tasks, they are acting as themselves, rather than playing hypothetical roles and simulated scenarios as in TBLT (Piccardo, 2020). The emphasis is also put on creating a final product: “Action-oriented tasks give users/learners the opportunity to engage in action – to come up with a well-defined outcome, to create an artefact: a visible product” (Piccardo & North, 2019, p. 278). The differences between tasks in the action-oriented approach and TBLT are summarized in Table 1:

Table 1

Task-based learning and teaching (TBLT) vs. the action-oriented approach (AoA) to language learning (Piccardo & North, 2019)

Tablica 1

Usporedba učenja i poučavanja utemeljenog na zadacima i akcijski usmjerenog pristupa učenju jezika (Piccardo i North, 2019)

TBLT	AoA
Transactional (and sometimes mechanical, trivial)	Creative
Often uses roles, fake personalities	Learners are themselves (self-efficacy)
Requires limited agency from the learner	Full agency is required from the learner in deciding how to approach the task, dividing the work and responsibilities in a chosen manner, seeking source material, designing the product.
Simulated reality	Classroom as authentic social milieu; authentic goals; authentic material.
Limited responsibility. Limited choices.	Real problem-solving; real decision making.

2.3.2. Scenarios

Action-oriented tasks are more wide-ranging than TBLT tasks, often taking longer to complete and unfolding over several lessons as part of a structured teaching sequence (Piccardo & North, 2019). These tasks are usually grounded in a ‘scenario’ that provides context and relevance for the learners. A summary of the scenario sets the stage for groups of learners by placing them in a simulated context. It clearly explains their mission and the specific conditions and constraints they need to navigate within

to accomplish it. Importantly, learners are not simply role-playing; that is, they engage with the scenario as themselves, forming their own opinions and plans.

According to Piccardo (2022), scenarios are complex undertakings that require careful planning to be effective. First, a brief but clear summary that outlines the final task is needed. Second, it is also important to break the scenario down into a series of steps or subtasks, which are coherent and logically flow one into another. Finally, it is crucial to provide clear explanations about the purposes and goals: why the scenario is being used and what skills or abilities learners will improve in the end. Piccardo (2022) further explains that the summary should be written in simple language so that students can understand it easily. This will help them discern what needs to be done and evaluate what competences they need to develop to be successful. As they complete the subtasks, students can use their current competences and develop new ones by taking part in different communication activities. By doing these activities, they can improve their overall competences and become more effective communicators.

Piccardo and Payre-Ficout (2022) give the following example of a scenario from the Linguistic and Cultural Diversity Reinvented (LINCDIRE) project, which was a joint project between North American and European educational institutions with the goal of encouraging the action-oriented approach to language teaching.

Our Community Cookbook (Levels A2-B1)

Some parents in your community have complained that their children are too picky with their food. They are looking for interesting and tasty recipes to try out and have asked your class for help compiling a new community cookbook. You and your classmates have decided to contribute recipes from different cultures and countries around the world. For this task, each student will create one entry in the cookbook based on their family's favourite recipe. When the cookbook is completed, you will put it all together and bring a copy home to your family.

They break down the subtasks into steps in the following way:

1. An investigation/comprehension phase:
 - Each learner must investigate his/her family's favourite recipes and their origins.

- Learners activate prior knowledge, both language and non-language-related knowledge.
2. An implementation phase:
- Each learner also has to learn more about his/her classmates and his/her cultures. They interact together by explaining, asking questions, offering comments and suggestions.
 - Finally, learners have to work together to select and compile the different recipes to reflect the cultures of the classroom and offer a culinary tour of the world. (Piccardo and Payre-Ficot, 2022, p. 33)

Piccardo (2022) suggests that clear purposes and goals can be provided by CEFR-based descriptors which can be adapted or expanded to fit the specific context. These descriptors can also be used to create assessment tools for both teachers and students in order to evaluate progress. The descriptors in the CEFR CV, as described by Piccardo (2022) and Piccardo and North (2019), can serve two main purposes. Firstly, they clarify the curriculum by outlining objectives, and secondly, they provide clear criteria for assessment. Piccardo (2020) stresses the need to find a balance and be selective when choosing descriptors by focusing on the most important ones. When creating scenarios and selecting the descriptors, it is also important to keep in mind practical aspects by taking into consideration what learners can realistically achieve and whether the long-term goals of the syllabus are being met.

2.3.3. Backward Design

There are various ways to design tasks for language classes, including backward design. This approach entails starting with the outcome of the task, that is, what learners will be able to achieve at the end of the task, and then working backward to plan the steps needed to achieve that goal. Backward design and scenario planning form the backbone of the action-oriented approach (Piccardo & North, 2019). Moreover, the development of both the scenario and the steps leading to the final task involves a cyclical process of planning.

Richards (2013) suggests three approaches to developing and implementing language teaching programs, including forward design, central design, and backward design. Each of these approaches to curriculum is different with regard to issues such as input, process, and outcomes. Forward design is characterized by beginning with syllabus planning, then

proceeding to methodology, and finally to assessing learning outcomes. On the other hand, central design starts with classroom processes and methodology, with syllabus and learning outcomes being refined as the curriculum unfolds. Backward design takes a different approach and commences with clearly defined learning outcomes, which are used as guides to develop instructional processes and input.

The majority of teachers use the 'forward' approach when it comes to teaching content. This means that they follow a predetermined syllabus and focus on planning activities that are aligned with specific syllabus points. Richards (2013) contends that this method has been the traditional way of developing language curricula.

Townend et al. (2022) suggest that backward design is a very effective approach to curriculum design since it moves away from a linear focus on grammatical structures and instead emphasizes the practical benefits for learners. When designing programs, this approach involves using clear outcomes, ministry guidelines, and institutional standards. The process prioritizes the needs of the school board or institution, the teaching environment, and the learners themselves. Accordingly, learner outcomes from national curricula can be used as starting points for the development of scenarios. Teachers can use action-oriented scenarios to plan steps and activities that support learners' progress to complete the final task. In brief, the backward design approach can be used as a basis for action-oriented scenarios with the aim of developing language learner competences.

2.4. English Language Teaching in Croatian Elementary and High Schools: Curriculum Overview and CEFR Alignment

According to the English Language Curriculum in Croatia, the major aims of teaching English as a foreign language in elementary and high schools are to promote learners' communicative and intercultural competences, to contribute to learners' personal development, as well as to encourage life-long learning (Ministry of Science and Education, 2019). It recognizes the importance for Croatian learners to learn English since it has become the global language. Accordingly, the curriculum is designed to develop language learners' communicative abilities, both in spoken and written forms, to encourage cultural awareness, and to enhance learner autonomy.

The curriculum is based on outcomes which are organized around three main domains: Communicative Language Competence, Intercultural Communicative Competence, and Autonomy in Language Learning. These

domains are integral parts of the English Language Curriculum and form a unified whole with outcomes that support and complement one another.

Educational outcomes from the domain of Communicative Language Competence are based on acquiring knowledge of the English language, including vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, registers, and features of verbal and non-verbal interaction, as well as the mastery of communicative activities, such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, and mediation. Interestingly, the Croatian English Language Curriculum, similar to the CEFR, also notes the importance of the concept of mediation in language learning:

Jezično posredovanje (jezična medijacija) složena je jezična djelatnost koja uključuje istovremenu ili naizmjeničnu jezičnu recepciju i produkciju. U usmenome jezičnome posredovanju jedna osoba omogućuje komunikaciju među drugim osobama koje ne govore isti jezik. Pismeno ili kombinirano jezično posredovanje podrazumijeva sažimanje ili prevođenje više pisanih ili govorenih tekstova u skladu s kulturološkim obilježjima zemlje ciljnog jezika za potrebe druge osobe (Ministry of Science and Education, 2019, p. 9).¹

Language mediation is described as a complex activity that involves both receptive and productive language skills. In addition, the close connection between language and culture is emphasized. Within this domain, albeit subtly, the social aspect of learning, as well as learner agency is implied: “Razvojem komunikacijske kompetencije potiče se socijalizacija i cjelokupan razvoj svestrane stvaralačke ličnosti učenika” (Ministry of Science and Education, 2019, p. 9).² In other words, socialization and creativity play a role in the development of learners’ communicative competencies.

Recognizing that we live in a multilingual and multicultural world necessitates the inclusion of interculturality in education, as stipulated in the English Language Curriculum (Ministry of Science and Education, 2019). This emphasizes the importance of developing learners’ awareness of

¹ Linguistic mediation is a complex language activity that involves simultaneous or alternating language reception and production. In oral linguistic mediation, one person facilitates communication between others who do not speak the same language. Written or combined linguistic mediation involves summarizing or translating multiple written or spoken texts in accordance with the cultural characteristics of the target language’s country for the needs of another person.

² The development of communicative competence fosters socialization and the overall growth of a well-rounded, creative personality in students.

themselves as individuals and social beings who are interested in cultural diversity. The domain of Intercultural Communicative Competence, consequently, aims to develop learners' awareness, knowledge, and skills related to other cultures, as well as to improve their understanding and respect for different cultures by facilitating communication among people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Educational outcomes in this domain include the ability for learners to identify cultural similarities and differences, to be empathetic and respectful towards English speakers and their cultures, to engage with English literature, and to be able to communicate effectively with speakers of different cultural backgrounds. Akin to the CEFR and the CEFR CV, the Croatian English Language Curriculum once again reinforces the social identity of language learners. Moreover, intercultural competence can be equated with pluricultural competence as espoused by the CEFR CV since they both describe effective engagement with diverse cultures, although the latter might imply a more complex engagement with multiple cultures simultaneously (Council of Europe, 2020).

The third domain, Autonomy in Language Learning, is described as the ability of learners to take responsibility for their own language learning (Ministry of Science and Education, 2019). It includes the learners' affective and cognitive development, along with the development of critical thinking, creative expression, metacognitive skills, and media literacy. Educational outcomes in this domain include the learner's ability to plan, organize, monitor, and evaluate their own learning, and to develop motivation and persistence. Learners need to be able to effectively use information from various sources, improve communication skills, and build self-confidence and self-respect, which will help lay the groundwork for lifelong learning. Comparisons with the concept of learner autonomy as operationalized in the Croatian English Language Curriculum, with the CEFR CV center on the notion of agency. Namely, one of the key differences between the CEFR and the CEFR CV with regard to the action-oriented approach is the promotion of learner agency in the updated version. North (2022) has argued that upon the introduction of the CEFR (2001), most educational institutions focused on learner autonomy, whereas the CEFR CV stresses the importance of promoting learner agency. Considering the fact that the Croatian language curriculum was published before the CEFR CV, it appears that autonomy has been emphasized more so than agency. Nevertheless, this does identify the need for revisions and updates regarding the current Croatian English language curriculum.

3. AIM AND METHOD

3.1. Aim

The aim of this paper is to give an overview of the action-oriented approach and to identify ways in which it could be applied in the Croatian context. In particular, it shows how learning outcomes from the Croatian English Language Curriculum for elementary and high schools can be used as a basis for creating scenarios. The following results show scenarios created by Croatian English language teachers.

3.2. Method

The participants included 20 Croatian English language teachers who worked at the high school and elementary school level, including 19 female and one male participant. The age of teachers ranged from 25 to 50. Participants were recruited during a talk/workshop at the 32nd Annual International HUPE conference in Poreč, Croatia. The teachers were informed of the aims of the workshop (creating scenarios) and were advised that their participation was voluntary and would remain anonymous. They were also told that the scenarios that they created would be published. The teachers were then asked to sign a consent form, which asked for their written consent to participate in the study.

With regard to the procedure, eight groups were randomly formed, consisting of 2-3 teachers. Each group was given a learner outcome from the Croatian English Language Curriculum targeting elementary or high school learners. Outcomes were chosen from the domain of Intercultural Communicative Competence. This domain was selected because it was well-suited to the limited time available in the 60-minute workshop and allowed for a focused and manageable task for participants. Prior to the activity, teachers were introduced to the action-oriented approach, the principles of backward design, and an illustrative scenario based on Piccardo and Payre-Ficout (2022), which served as a model for developing their own scenarios. The learner outcomes were presented on cards in Croatian; in addition, an English translation was given. Based on these learner outcomes, teachers were asked to create their own scenarios, and if they had time, follow-up stages or subtasks that learners would need to do. At the end of the workshop, teachers presented their scenarios on a poster to the rest of the participants.

4. RESULTS

The following is a presentation of the scenarios created by Croatian English language teachers. A total of eight learner outcomes were distributed, which teachers used to create scenarios (and in some cases, follow-up stages) that reflect the action-oriented approach to language teaching. Two pictures (Scenarios 2 and 4) are shown in Figures 1 and 2 as examples of the posters teachers made.

Scenario 1

This group was given the following educational outcome ('odgojno-obrazovni ishod'): *Uses key conventions of polite behavior in intercultural encounters and, in a simple way, seeks clarification to understand culturally conditioned content* ('Koristi se ključnim konvencijama uljudnoga ponašanja u međukulturnim susretima te na jednostavan način traži pojašnjenje radi razumijevanja kulturno uvjetovanih sadržaja') (OŠ (1) EJ B.4.3.).

The teachers created the following scenario:

You are on a student exchange with students in the UK. Prepare what you need to go into town.

The stages for preparation included:

1. Preparing polite phrases for greetings (they should be age-appropriate, match with situations and people).
2. Research phrases for various situations:
 - a. In a shop
 - b. At a restaurant/café
 - c. Public transport

Also, do research regarding currency, traditional dishes, means of transport, types of shops, and asking for directions.

3. Make videos to present your results – act out the scenarios using the new vocabulary.

Scenario 2

The second group worked with the following educational outcome ('odgojno-obrazovni ishod'): *Recognizes and describes basic strategies for avoiding and/or overcoming culturally conditioned misunderstandings and discusses the impact of accepting and/or excluding others and those that are different in familiar situations* ('Prepoznaje i opisuje osnovne strategije za izbjegavanje i/ili prevladavanje kulturno uvjetovanih nesporazuma i raspravlja o utjecaju prihvaćanja i/ili isključivanja drugih i drugačijih u poznatim situacijama') (OŠ (1) EJ B.5.3.).

The teachers created the following scenario:

A student from India (who is in your class) invites you to their birthday party at their home. You are aware of certain cultural differences and want to make sure you don't offend their cultural heritage.

The stages for preparation included:

1. Brainstorm gift-giving customs both for the Indian student and their parents (also consider what behavior is expected from a guest coming to an Indian household).
2. Review all the information gathered and decide on the most important elements related to this birthday scenario.
3. To be continued....

Scenario 3

This group had the following educational outcome ('odgojno-obrazovni ishod'): *Investigates additional information about target language countries to understand culturally conditioned content about one's own culture and foreign cultures.* ('Istražuje dodatne informacije o zemljama ciljnoga jezika radi razumijavanja kulturno uvjetovanih sadržaja o vlastitoj kulturi i stranim kulturama') (OŠ (1) EJ B.6.1.).

The teachers created the following scenario:

You are taking part in an international project (it's an e-Twinning project). You come from Šibenik, Croatia. There are two UNESCO monuments in Šibenik. Other students come from Granada, Spain, and Sintra, Portugal. Your task is to create a 10-minute-long presentation on St. James' Cathedral and St. Nicholas' Fortress. Compare with UNESCO monuments from partner countries that students have presented.

The stages for preparation included:

1. Do research in order to find information on the UNESCO monuments in your town.

Scenario 4

The fourth group had the following educational outcome ('odgojno-obrazovni ishod'): *Compares similarities and differences between one's own culture, the cultures of target language countries, and other cultures.* ('Upoređuje sličnosti i razlike među vlastitom kulturom, kulturama zemalja ciljnoga jezika i drugim kulturama') (OŠ (1) EJ B.7.1.).

The teachers created the following scenario:

Your British pen friend is coming to Croatia over the Christmas holidays. You are planning a joint Croatian and British Evening during which you want to get acquainted with Xmas traditions in both countries.

The stages for preparation included:

1. Brainstorm. Research the internet for traditional British Xmas dishes, songs (carols), movies, and other traditional holiday activities.
2. Gather the info. Compare the similarities and differences (between cultures). Decide what to keep and what to discard.
3. Make a poster to present the plan for the evening.

Scenario 5

The fifth group worked with the following educational outcome ('odgojno-obrazovni ishod'): *Questions and evaluates stereotypes and prejudices at all levels and in all forms, proposing strategies to avoid and/or overcome misunderstandings, and to uncover and deconstruct stereotypes and prejudices* ('Preispituje i procjenjuje stereotipe i predrasude na svim razinama i u svim oblicima te predlaže strategije za izbjegavanje i/ili prevladavanje nesporazuma, otkrivanje i razgradnju stereotipa i predrasuda') (SŠ (1) EJ B.1.3.).

The teachers created the following scenario:

Your friend is leaving for a student exchange in Cairo, Egypt. He doesn't know much about Egyptian culture and customs. You have already participated in Erasmus in Egypt, and your experience can be of great value to him. Write a tips & tricks manual for him.

The manual should cover advice on:

- How to talk to his female/male colleagues to stay polite and respectful of their religion and culture
- The dress code and social situations' conduct
- Appropriate communication when addressing his teachers
- Food and dining etiquette
- Health information regarding tap water, vaccination
- Language (should he learn Arabic).

Browse the Internet (WHO page, government official pages, and so on...) and write the manual.

Scenario 6

The sixth group was given the following educational outcome ('odgojno-obrazovni ishod'): *Discuss the impact of intercultural experiences on shaping one's beliefs and attitudes towards others* ('Raspravlja o utjecaju

međukulturnih iskustava na oblikovanje vlastitih uvjerenja i stavova prema drugima') (SŠ (1) EJ B.2.4.).

The teachers created the following scenario:

A 16-year-old Ukrainian student recently moved into our town. He doesn't know any Croatian, and his level of English is A1. He has trouble communicating with his peers and fitting into the class. What can students do to help him fit in and avoid prejudice towards foreigners?

The stages for preparation included:

- Brainstorm: Ideas to help? Find relevant information. Duolingo
- Find mutual interests, hobbies, sports activities you could include this student in.

Scenario 7

This group of teachers was given the following educational outcome ('odgojno-obrazovni ishod'): *Integrates various cultural elements to create a comprehensive view of one's own and other cultures* ('Integrira različite kulturne elemente i stvara cjelovitu sliku vlastite i drugih kultura') (SŠ (1) EJ B.3.1.).

The teachers created the following scenario:

A Japanese friend comes to visit you. During his stay, you need to attend a wedding. You decide to take him with you.

Your friend wants to know what to bring as a gift, how to dress, and how to behave. He would like to know what food and drinks will be served and what the wedding ceremony looks like.

In order to give appropriate advice, you need to find out about Japanese wedding customs (food, drinks, clothes, dances, gifts...) so that you can prepare him for the differences.

Scenario 8

This group had the following educational outcome ('odgojno-obrazovni ishod'): *Applies personal strategies to avoid and/or overcome misunderstandings, uncover and deconstruct stereotypes and prejudices, and adjusts one's thoughts and actions empathetically to maintain successful relationships and prevent problematic situations in intercultural interactions* ('Primjenjuje vlastite strategije za izbjegavanje i/ili prevladavanje nesporazuma, otkrivanje i razgradnju stereotipa i predrasuda te prilagođava i zbog empatije mijenja vlastita razmišljanja i postupke kako bi se održavali upješni odnosi i sprječavale problematične situacije u međukulturnim kontaktima') (SŠ (1) EJ B.4.3.).

The teachers created the following scenario:

Renting an apartment in Osijek

A student from the USA is coming to Osijek for a period of 1 school year. You should help the American student decide on the location, cost, and size of the apartment.

The stages for preparation included:

1. Students gather information about apartment renting in the USA.
2. Students suggest an apartment for rent in Osijek and explain the reasons for their choice (location, roommates, costs, furnished or not...).

Figure 1

Scenario 2

Slika 1

Scenarij 2

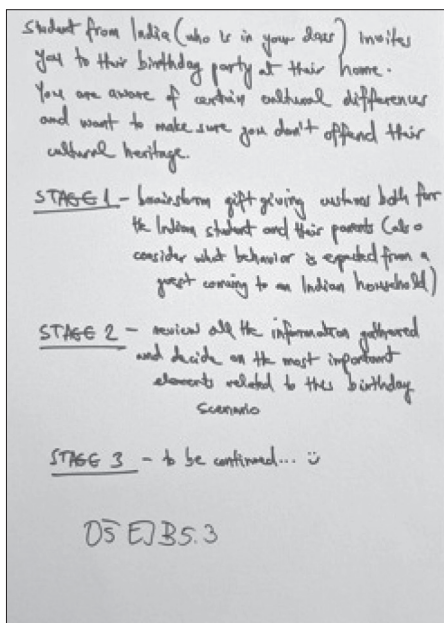
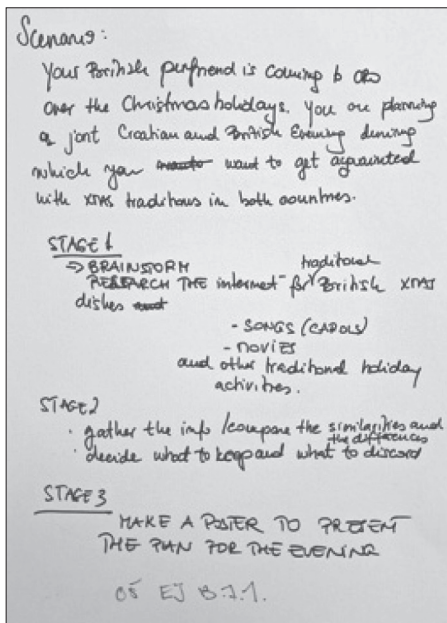


Figure 2

Scenario 4

Slika 2

Scenarij 4



5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the action-oriented approach, learners are considered social agents who collaboratively create meaning through interactions, using their mediation, plurilingual, and pluricultural competences. With regard to learning and teaching, the action-oriented approach can be used for curriculum planning by using backward design while focusing on learners' real-life communicative needs. Furthermore, it can be implemented in the classroom

through purposeful, collaborative tasks where learners co-construct meaning through interaction and mediation to achieve specific goals (e.g., creating a product). The principles of affordances, or opportunities for learning, as well as agency, in which the learner makes decisions and takes responsibility for their actions, are key elements of the action-oriented approach to learning languages. Both affordances and agency can be realized through tasks, in particular, task-based scenarios. Scenarios replicate real-world situations that allow students to engage in meaningful, authentic activities that prepare them for practical language use in various contexts. Backward design plays an important role in the action-oriented approach as it aligns teaching and learning with real-world communication goals and learner outcomes that can form the basis for scenarios. The CEFR and the CEFR CV descriptors can provide outcomes for these scenarios, as can outcomes in national curricula. For example, the Croatian English Language Curriculum can provide learner outcomes from the three domains, which teachers can use for creating scenarios.

The aim of this paper is to introduce the action-oriented approach to English language teachers in Croatia, to stimulate cooperation in the creation of scenarios, and to improve teaching practices. As this paper is not an empirical study, the scenarios are presented illustratively rather than analysed, with the purpose of offering teachers concrete examples of how the action-oriented approach can be translated into classroom practice. During the talk/workshop, teachers were introduced to the main characteristics and theoretical background of the action-oriented approach, including an example of a scenario and follow-up stages that could be used. Teachers managed to come up with practical scenarios that reflected the outcomes they were given. Since the groups were formed randomly according to the seating arrangement, there was a mixture of elementary and high school teachers in the groups. Despite the time limitations and blend of teachers from different levels in the groups, teachers came up with several scenarios that included topics such as exchanges, celebrations, international projects, holiday traditions, and welcoming and helping foreign students. In all these scenarios, students act as themselves in real-world situations, use the target language (in this case, English) to carry out the task, and must come up with a final product. In other words, learners need to apply their knowledge of English in meaningful contexts. The teacher's role is that of a facilitator who provides guidance to learners, enabling them to take ownership of their learning. Similar action-oriented initiatives have also been implemented in a range of international contexts, including Ireland, Canada,

and Japan, demonstrating the approach's adaptability across diverse curricula (Curriculum Online, 2017; Transforming FSL, 2015; Tono & Negishi, 2012). Moreover, the LINCDIRE project represents a clear implementation of the action-oriented approach, as it engages learners in authentic, plurilingual, and intercultural tasks that position them as social agents collaborating across global contexts (Hauck et al., 2020).

The action-oriented approach reflects current trends in language teaching and takes the communicative approach a step further. It can foster learner engagement and autonomy, as well as provide a context for authentic language use. However, despite the benefits, there are some challenges to using the action-oriented approach. For example, in a study carried out by Townend et al. (2022), they noted that teachers mentioned time constraints as one of the challenges. Namely, teachers had difficulties in deciding when to carry out the scenario within their current course schedule and other teaching obligations. Furthermore, they felt that they sometimes lacked experience and professional training in using the action-oriented approach and scenarios in language learning classrooms. In addition, at times, teachers were indecisive about how much support and scaffolding they should provide to enable students to complete the task independently. Other considerations may include the difficulty of assessment and the possibility that learners with lower proficiency or L2 anxiety may feel overwhelmed and unwilling to participate.

Notwithstanding the challenges, with planning and cooperation among teachers and administrators, collaborative tasks can be embedded into the curriculum. The limitations of this paper include the small number of participants who participated in the workshop and the lack of time to create scenarios. Nevertheless, Croatian English language teachers showed that they are very resourceful and can create interesting scenarios regardless of the restrictions. The examples can hopefully serve as an impetus for other English language teachers to use the action-oriented approach in their classrooms. Scenarios can provide a change of pace to traditional language classes and provide learners with a setting to collaborate and use the language in authentic contexts to improve their language competences. In sum, the action-oriented approach can be used to help improve teaching methods and practices in language learning.

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Provedba akcijski usmjerenoga pristupa: unaprjeđenje nastave engleskoga jezika u Hrvatskoj upotrebom scenarija

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Sveučilište u Zadru

Zajednički europski referentni okvir za jezike (ZERO) značajno je utjecao na nastavu jezika, naglašavajući akcijski usmjereni pristup koji promatra učenike kao društvene sudionike koji ispunjavaju smislene zadatke u stvarnim životnim situacijama. Dopunski svezak ZEROJ-a proširuje ovaj pristup uvođenjem pojmova kao što su posredovanje i višejezične kompetencije te doraduje postojeće opisnike. Akcijski usmjereni pristup u središte stavlja upotrebu scenarija utemeljenih na obrnutom dizajnu koji je usklađen s ishodima učenja. U ovom radu istražuje se provedba akcijski usmjerenoga pristupa u nastavi engleskoga jezika u Hrvatskoj. Cilj mu je upoznati nastavnike s njegovim načelima i pokazati njegovu kompatibilnost s postojećim programima. Posebice predstavlja scenarije koje su izradili hrvatski nastavnici engleskoga jezika, oslanjajući se na ishode u nacionalnome kurikulumu. Studija opisuje ZEROJ, Dopunski svezak ZEROJ-a, akcijski usmjereni pristup i kurikulum nastavnoga predmeta Engleski jezik, nakon čega slijedi prezentacija scenarija. Dobiveni rezultati ističu praktičnu primjenu pristupa, pritom ukazujući na postojeće izazove i ograničenja vezane za samu provedbu. Čitateljima se također pružaju smjernice za unaprjeđenje nastave poučavanja engleskoga kao stranoga jezika u Hrvatskoj.

Ključne riječi: Zajednički europski referentni okvir za jezike (ZEROJ), akcijski usmjereni pristup, Dopunski svezak ZEROJ-a, nastava engleskoga jezika, kurikulum nastavnoga predmeta Engleski jezik, scenariji

