Dear Colleagues,

I would like to thank the organizers of this event to invite me to participate. It is a great honor for me to speak at this forum.

I live in Israel, in Jerusalem, I immigrated almost 30 years ago from Russia. My grandfather, Alexander Todorov, was Bulgarian, his family was originally from the city of Shumen. I dedicate this presentation to his memory.

I am a beginning teacher for Hebrew as a second language and I’m a librarian.

In the following presentation I have summarized one experience I had as a teacher for Hebrew as a second language in an online course during spring 2019. The course was organized by the Levinsky College of Education in Israel (Where next year I will complete my studies as a teacher for Hebrew) together with the University of Boston. My pupil, from a Jewish background, was a student at the Faculty for Mathematics of the Boston University, in the United States.

The main goal of the course was to improve the student’s conversational skills in the Hebrew language. The subject was agreed in advance between the parts. It was “Food”. When planning the course, I took into consideration the level of the student (intermediate) and his age (19 years old). The idea was to teach current Hebrew, it means, Hebrew as it is spoken, and alive in Israel today.

Before the start of the course, I was confronted with two questions:

1. Which topics to choose?
2. How to enrich the student’s language and cultural knowledge?

I choose the topics from my experience, as a person who studies, works, and lives in Jerusalem; they are as following:

1. Meeting with a cup of coffee at the Hebrew University
2. Machane Yehuda Market or Shuk – the Central Market in Jerusalem
3. The Passover bowl and the Botanical garden of the Hebrew University

To deal with the second question “how” I based my approach on six criteria:

1. First: Spatial opening, that is, choosing topics from what is happening in different places in the city of Jerusalem. Among the places I chose: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the Botanical Garden of the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus, and the central market of Jerusalem.
2. Second: A contextual approach? **גישה הקשרית** which poses the dialog at the center of teaching and learning. It allows for openness, facilitates different channel of knowledge, and takes into consideration cultural and gender differences.
3. Third: To speak Hebrew in our meetings as it is spoken in Israel today and on the street.
4. Fourth: To facilitate the presence of different persons and voices in the videos and pictures: Jews, Arabs, religious, seculars, men, and women.
5. Fifth: Listening to different kind of oral texts: Instructions, explanations, advertisements.
6. Sixth: In each video speaks only one person.

Besides, I decided in advance that grammatical matters should be addressed one by one and only in cases of difficulties or misunderstandings in listening or reading.

My wish was:

* To wake up the curiosity of the student for current Israel culture, and this way to stimulate our dialog.
* To transmit to the student the sense of “experience”, to approach as much as possible, by means of technology, into Israel world.

To achieve these goals, I made short videos, in which people speak and tell about life at different places in Jerusalem and as related to “Food”.

I choose authentic places. The people, I chose, I was sure they would be willing to collaborate. From three speaking persons, two I knew from before.

In each movie, only one person speaks at the time.

I made the videos with camera of the personal mobile phone, without the possibility of rehearsals in the photo.

Before shooting the videos, I asked the participants to speak slowly and to use simple words (so that a learner of Hebrew as a second language would understand).

I used the following technology:

I prepared PPT slides to each lesson. The meetings took place through ZOOM. The materials were delivered to the student through Google Drive, by a link I sent to him.

Before the class, in each slide I included pictures and links to relevant information about the relevant place, in which the movie was recorded, such as an historical tour at the Hebrew University, a link to the site of the Central Market of Jerusalem, to a site of Israeli songs and a site of wild plants in Israel.

The videos were also used in all lessons to exercise listening comprehension.

The course with this student from Boston consisted in three meetings of 60 minutes each.

Before the course started, we had and introductory meeting through zoom.

**Lesson one: The “Meeting with a cup of coffee at the Hebrew University”.**

We talked about morning drink typical of the culture activity of our world.

For this first lesson, I prepared information about the Israeli “Cappuccino”, the “Caffe Hafukh” (Milk coffee), which is immensely popular in Israel. The information included the different ways it can be served, such as strong or weak, normal, hot, with foam or without, etc. The Israelis are very pedantic about details when they order coffee, for example about the temperature, amount of foam or milk, and even about the kind of sugar. In Israel, drinking coffee is especially important in the early morning hours.

I photographed the cafeteria at the Hebrew University, where I work as a librarian, so that the student could have a true idea about the place. In the foreground of the photo appears the young man who makes the best coffee in the Campus, his name is Haled. I made also use of the funny placards/posters? written on the cafeteria’s board in order to practice reading, such as “*Haled, the King of Coffee”* or *“I came to get a degree and I stayed for the coffee”*.

Finally, I show to the student a short video (a minute and a half), in which Haled tells us, in an easy Hebrew, what are the secrets in the preparation of a good Israeli cappuccino. The student smiled when I showed him the drawings and faces that Haled makes to the clients on the coffee foam.

After reading and listening, the student told me about breakfast ingredients in America, in Boston city.

To my surprise, he stated that in his opinion coffee is not so healthy and that he prefers to drink tee, in the morning and in the evening.

**Lesson two: Shopping in the Central Market (Shuk Mahane Yehuda).**

For the class, I photographed different stands in the Jerusalem Central Market. On some of the slides, I wrote the name of the stand owner, whom I knew.

In the class, and around the pictures, we spoke about the different kinds of fruits and vegetables, and a little about the stand owners. A asked the student to choose from the plenty of fruits, to prepare a fruit salad, that he would like to eat before “our picture tour” in the market. This virtual tour was as if we were walking between the stands and choosing products for the fruit salad. The student chose by himself. We had the common feeling we were playing a “shopping game”.

Then, we exercised with verbs, based on the recipe for the fruit salad. I selected those verbs, which were relevant for the preparation of a salad, and of common use in daily life: to choose, to peel, to cut, to slice, to put, to taste, etc. We continued in the market and at the end of the tour, we got to the “Desserts”.

Here, I showed to the student a video, in which the Halva seller, Raphael, explains how Tahina is prepared, the raw ingredient from which Halva is made.

In one of our conversations, the student tells that he loves chocolate, and explains which variety of chocolate he likes. So, we turned to “Sweets”.

Touring between the stands, we could appreciate the market atmosphere, and the different types of persons: Jews, Arabs, immigrants, and of course, we listen to the Hebrew on the street. A so old language, and at the same time so modern one.

Reading, listening, and speaking skills? were exercised as part of “our tour” in the market. This open way of learning stimulated a great curiosity in my student.

**Lesson Three: “Spring Holiday”**

This meeting took place during Passover.

Passover is an especially important holiday for the Jews. It takes place in the spring and commemorates the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt, from slavery to freedom. In Passover, it is prohibited to eat bread; instead, the Jews eat Matzah, a thin bread without yeast, called the bread of poverty.

In the first Passover night the story related to the Exodus is read; in the Hebrew language it is called the “Haggadah”.
The festive meal includes symbolic foods, arranged in a dish called the “Passover Bowl”.

In the first conversation between my student and me we focused on these symbolic foods contained in the “Passover bowl”. Next, we shared social experiences that every one of us had during the celebration. The student told about his experience with his friends in the United States, and I about my one in Israel. With proud, the student mentioned that he read the “Haggadah” in Hebrew, while other participants read it in English.

In our conversation about the “Passover bowl” we talked in more details about one of the symbolic dishes that is “Charoset”. This sweet dish is made from fruits and wine. It symbolizes the material, that Jews used to connect stones in building works in Egypt.

In Israel, people from different ethnical background live together, and of course, food is very varied. There are dishes from Greece, Iran, Russia, Iraq, Ethiopia, Yemen, Morocco and from other countries.

I linked “Charoset” to the variety of cultures and to the different recipes for its preparation.

We used the recipe for “Charoset” as an exercise on reading and to enrich student’s vocabulary.

Passover is also the holiday of spring. This was the reason why the second part of the lesson included an introduction to the plant world in Israel.

In a video, Yaara, the agronomist from the Botanical Garden at the Hebrew University, tells us about two typical plants of the Land of Israel. Her scientific angle of view was consistent with the student’s scientific curiosity. Had I the opportunity to continue the course I would have focused on the student's scientific interests, even on such a subject as food.

I symbolically used the clover plant (the agronomist spoke also about), comparing it to a ship, in order to wish to my student, metaphorically, a thriving continuation of his studies: “A successful navigation in the sea of words!”.

**Summary**

I think the following aspects are relevant:

* To allow the expression of subjects initiated by the student.

(For example, in the last lesson the student wanted to talk about his favorite books, he told about books from his Grandpa's library).

* To teach and learn with a sense of discovering a new world.
* To connect teaching contents with life in Israel (**or** To teach in order to connect to what is happening here in Israel).
* To arrange the lesson as a kind of personal experience, where the student is encouraged to choose, to compare and to reflect.

 **Besides…**

* The learner not only moves from one language to another, he moves to another world.
* It is important to build an atmosphere of patience and tolerance.
* The student should be given time and instruments to become familiar with the subject of the class, only then, a conversation should start.
* The teacher should bring to the class a **story** and use it as a kind of prelude, to stimulate the active participation of the student.
* Videos, in which different people speak in a natural language, make up a significant part of the linguistic and cultural experience.
* The teacher’s support and empathy are a prerequisite for the student learning success.

At the end of the course the student was asked to give a brief reflection on the course, three questions were asked:

1. How did the course contribute to improve your knowledge of the language?
2. Was the course interesting?
3. Did the course comply with your expectations?

Both, the student, and the teacher, enriched their experience during the conversation, which established a bridge between the two cultures.

The conversations between us were conducted in three performance modes: monologue, dialogue, and polyphony. **(add bibliographical source!)**

The monologue allowed to develop a subject of personal interest and motivated the other side to ask questions.

The dialogue was conducted in a question-answer manner.

In the polyphonic conversation each side recounted alternately similar experience they had.

In these three forms of discourse, cultural differences in the way the conversation was conducted, could be identified between the Israeli side and the American one.

**The American side:**

* Conducts a more formal conversation
* More willing to accept a monolithic conversation
* Preserves more a predetermined order of conversation

**The Israeli side:**

* Conducts a less formal conversation
* Prefers a more polyphonic conversation
* Conducts a more spontaneous conversation

**Insights from my experience**

* Both sides contributed to each other and were influenced by the cultural discourse of the other side.
* Teaching a second language has a high potential for linking between peoples and cultures.
* There is added value to language teaching as a cultural experience.