The history of the English language is a compulsory subject included into the curriculum of students majoring in English. As a theoretical course, it focuses students’ attention on the English language development from both diachronic, and synchronic perspective, spots the differences between Old, Middle and Modern English, guides them through the changes English has experienced over history. Obviously, English is not the only language whose structure has changed over time, and our idea was to highlight the similarities and differences between English as the major language and French, German and Spanish as minor languages our students learn as part of their compulsory curriculum. Despite belonging to different language groups, the four languages can be compared in terms of various grammar structures, thus giving students an opportunity to practice not only English, but also other languages they learn at university.

The aim of this article is to show the ways to incorporate the multilingual approach to teaching the history of English and to emphasize its advantages and disadvantages from both teacher, and student perspective.

Keywords: history of English, multilingual approach, compulsory curriculum, language learning.
has proved effective, on one hand, as it raises students’ awareness of the English language history and provides tools to confidently use Old and Middle English structures and forms mostly for academic purposes. On the other hand, modern world is fully accessible, which implies the need of learning and quickly switching between different languages that we learn. In this case, we believe, the multilingual approach can be highly beneficial. Apparently, this approach does not exclude practicing Old and Middle English, since this is the main focus of this subject, but incorporating different languages significantly helps the students to understand how various structures work.

We believe, one of the best ways to start is to challenge the students’ multilingual knowledge and to get them think about how many “English” words have been adopted by and adapted to this language. For instance, one of the exercises we offer the students at the start is random boxes, whereby they are supposed to guess/identify/find the origin of the word they choose to see on the screen¹:

As we can see, certain words are easier to guess (or so it seems), while certain are harder and less obvious. Leaning on our experience, we can say that this activity promotes students’ interest in how languages work, how they interact and how borrowings from different languages turned into common English words.

At this point, students gain a sense of how languages interact and take the initial step to prepare for a multilingual challenge. Since the main focus of the subject is

¹ To access the activity, click here: [https://wordwall.net/resource/29041382](https://wordwall.net/resource/29041382)
actually the history of English, it is a good idea to offer students interactive exercises that raise their awareness of the different milestones of the English language development. For instance, one of the excellent ways to reinforce the students’ knowledge of Old English word combinations can be the following exercise, whereby the students have to put the words in a correct order to make a word combination or a short sentence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>goda</th>
<th>cyning</th>
<th>se</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wæs</td>
<td>manna</td>
<td>wicost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wic</td>
<td>seo</td>
<td>geonge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At this stage, the students have a clearer idea of how Old English works, as they deal with grammar and syntactic structures that are very different from what they learn as Modern English. Leaning on Old English vocabulary and structures, we draw students’ attention to the similarities between English and German, get them spot the differences between English, French and Spanish, which they learn as their minor languages. This seems to be the perfect timing for the multilingual approach. It is necessary to point out that we see the multilingual approach as the integration into the lessons of predominantly grammar and syntax of other European languages that our students learn. We do employ some vocabulary, but only if it justified in terms of how

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2 To access the activity, click here: [https://wordwall.net/play/7353/192/592](https://wordwall.net/play/7353/192/592)
it helps the students track similarities and differences between English and other European languages.

Let us look at a couple of examples of how the multilingual approach can be integrated into the history of the English language via interactive exercises, which have proved effective and appreciated by modern students. For instance, as we study Old English nouns, we discuss its grammatical categories and compare their availability at different levels of the English language development. The students are aware of the fact that certain grammatical categories of the English noun have been lost over time, yet, they have been preserved in other European languages. Our idea is to benefit from this knowledge; hence, we have come up with the following interactive exercise:\footnote{To access the activity, click here: \url{https://wordwall.net/play/22690/427/552}}:

As we see, the students have to sort the nouns by the gender. First and foremost, this exercise reminds the students about the implicit gender in Modern English, takes them back to the gender division applicable to Old English. Moreover, through this exercise the students can compare English to other European languages in terms of how nouns work and see the difference between the explicit and implicit gender manifestation. In addition, it gives them an opportunity to recall the fact that masculinity and femininity (from grammar viewpoint) may very depending on a language and may not match across European languages.
Another example of the integration of the multilingual approach is the following:

In this case, the students are supposed to sort the verbs depending on the group they belong to (strong, week, regular, irregular). We see that this exercise focuses on Old English, because it was much richer in verb forms than Modern English, and we had to make sure the students are well aware of how verbs used to work in Old English. With the help of this exercise, we speculate on the difference between verb forms and classes at various stages of the English language development, spot the changes that Modern English has experienced and prepare to discuss what other European languages Old English looked like. Depending on a group level, it might be a good idea to ask the students to build an Old English sentence with any of these verbs or to give them a short reading paragraph and get them identify these verbs or verbs that are similar in their structure. Besides, this exercise can help us elicit from the students as many grammatical categories of the verb as we can (and as they can come up with).

4 To access the activity, click here: https://wordwall.net/play/24606/734/713
This activity is usually followed by the multilingual one, whereby the students are expected to identify as many grammatical categories of the verbs they see on the screen as possible:

Still another way to incorporate the multilingual approach is demonstrated in the exercise below. The students are supposed to solve the task and match the resulting number to its verbal equivalent:

We see that this exercise, again, focuses on Old English, as numerals have changed quite significantly over time, and we have to make sure the students are able to distinguish between the numeral structure at different stages of the English language development. To begin with, we draw their attention to the structure of certain Old

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5 To access the activity, click here: https://wordwall.net/resource/24321622
6 To access the activity, click here: https://wordwall.net/play/26117/917/764
English numerals and promote their multilingual thinking. This exercise is followed by the multilingual activity below⁷:

Once they have completed the exercise, the students feel free and comfortable to compare the numerals in different European languages, speculate on and make conclusions as to their structure, supply more examples of numerals in the languages they learn as minor ones.

The aforementioned examples are far from being the exhaustive list of the ways to integrate the multilingual approach into teaching and learning the history of English. Leaning on our experience, we can argue that such activities greatly benefit students’ awareness of the history of the English language and contributes into their knowledge of other languages. This is confirmed by student feedback, whereby they point out to the effectiveness of such an approach.

However, alongside numerous advantages, the multilingual approach is no stranger to disadvantages on both teacher’s, and student’s end. For instance, teachers’ and students’ language knowledge may not match, in which case teachers have a rather limited range of multilingual exercises they can offer their students. In addition, students’ language background may be quite poor, in which case the multilingual approach may be level-inappropriate. Thirdly, the students may lack motivation for

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⁷ To access the activity, click here: [https://wordwall.net/play/26121/480/474](https://wordwall.net/play/26121/480/474)
multilingual activities, in which case they may need to be made aware of the benefits of revising and using different languages during one lesson.

To sum up, this approach has proved effective, and we believe that it has the potential to benefit language students. Depending on the students’ level, this approach can have more variations and manifestations in the future.

References