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VISUAL STIMULI TO FOSTER PHILOSOPHICAL DISCUSSION IN THE UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM

Svetlana Yu. Danilina (Kyiv, Ukraine)

sv.danilina@gmail.com

[ORCID: 0000-0002-2005-9363](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2005-9363)

PhD in Philology, Associate Professor at the Department of Foreign Languages for the Faculties of History and Philosophy, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine)
60, Volodymyrska Street, 01601, Kyiv, Ukraine

Halyna P. Sudorzhenko (Kyiv, Ukraine)

halyna.sudorzhenko@knlu.edu.ua

[ORCID: 0009-0001-2368-8923](https://orcid.org/0009-0001-2368-8923)

PhD in Philology, Associate Professor at the Department of Spanish and Modern Greek Philology and Translation, Kyiv National Linguistic University (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine)
03680, Kyiv, Velyka Vasylkivska Street, 73

Fostering meaningful speaking activities in foreign language (FL) university classes presents a lot of challenges for the learners due to the complex nature of subjects discussed in university courses. This article explores the integration of visual art—specifically Albert Gleizes' Composition with Guitar—as a pedagogical tool to stimulate discussion of Henri Bergson's philosophical concepts, particularly his ideas of time and intuition, as well as their impact on the rise of modernist outlook. Drawing

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Судорженко Г. П. [Sudorzhenko H. P.], halyna.sudorzhenko@knlu.edu.ua

on existing research on the use of visual aids in ESP and FL instruction, the study highlights how visual stimuli enhance language acquisition, encourage critical thinking, and support the interpretation of abstract ideas. The classes that the article features were conducted with upper-intermediate philosophy students of English at KNU, who successfully engaged with Bergson's theory of duration and the dynamic nature of perception through analysis of Cubist artwork; and with the students of Spanish at KNU, who discussed how Bergsonian concepts ushered in the advent of modernism. The activity fostered the use of field-specific vocabulary and facilitated deeper philosophical reflection. Findings suggest that visual art not only improves fluency and communicative competence but also supports higher-order thinking by bridging language learning and disciplinary content. The article concludes that visual art represents a valuable, yet underutilized, resource in teaching philosophy and philology students, with strong potential to enhance both conceptual and linguistic understanding. Further research would be recommended to explore this interdisciplinary approach more systematically.

Keywords: *foreign language instruction, university classroom, ESP, philosophy, speaking practice.*

ПОЗАЧАСОВЕ МИСТЕЦТВО ЯК ЗАСІБ ЗАОХОЧЕННЯ СТУДЕНТІВ ДО ФІЛОСОФСЬКОЇ ДИСКУСІЇ ПРО ЧАС

Світлана Юрїївна Даниліна (м. Київ, Україна)

sv.danilina@gmail.com

[ORCID: 0000-0002-2005-9363](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2005-9363)

кандидат філологічних наук,
доцент кафедри іноземних мов історичного та філософського факультетів,
Київський національний університет імені Тараса Шевченка
(Міністерство освіти і науки України),
01601, м. Київ, вулиця Володимирська, 60

(Current issues in linguodidactics [Aktual'ni pytannja lingvodydaktyky])

Visual Stimuli to Foster Philosophical Discussion in the University Classroom (in English)

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Sudorzenko H. P. [Sudorzenko H. P.], halyna.sudorzenko@knu.edu.ua

Галина Петрівна Судорженко (м. Київ, Україна)

halyna.sudorzhenko@knlu.edu.ua

[ORCID: 0009-0001-2368-8923](https://orcid.org/0009-0001-2368-8923)

кандидат філологічних наук,
доцент кафедри іспанської і новогрецької філології та перекладу,
Київський національний лінгвістичний університет
(Міністерство освіти і науки України)
03680, м. Київ, вулиця Велика Васильківська, 73

У статті розглядається використання творів мистецтва як ефективного інструменту для стимулювання мовлення на філософську тематику на заняттях з англійської для спеціальних цілей і практичних занять з іноземної мови. Зокрема, аналіз картини Альбера Глезіса “Композиція з гітарою” допоміг студентам осмислити і обговорити філософські ідеї Анрі Бергсона, які стосуються часу та інтуїції, а також їхнього впливу на виникнення модерністської течії у мистецтві. Візуальні стимули сприяли розвитку критичного мислення, активному засвоєнню фахової лексики та формуванню навичок висловлювання абстрактних ідей іноземною мовою. Дослідження підтверджує, що завдяки ілюструванню філософського змісту за допомогою творів мистецтва створюється продуктивне середовище для мовної практики та розуміння складних філософських концепцій. Такий підхід є перспективним напрямом для подальших досліджень у галузі викладання ESP для студентів неспеціальних факультетів і для викладання практики мови для студентів-філологів.

***Ключові слова:** викладання іноземних мов, заняття в університеті, іноземна мова для спеціальних цілей, філософія, практика мовлення.*

It could be a challenging task for a university instructor to foster a philosophical discussion in a foreign language classroom, given the exceptional complexity of this academic field [2]. Because philosophy is mainly associated with written texts, which also serve as the main source of input in the classroom, other kinds of materials can breathe some fresh air into classroom interaction and provide an entertaining change to a regular classroom routine. For example, works of art prove to be a valuable tool to stimulate speaking in lessons and to help students gain new insights both into philosophical questions and into their understanding of art. This article will discuss the

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© Даниліна С. Ю. [Danylina S. Yu.], sv.danilina@gmail.com,

Судорженко Г. П. [Sudorzhenko H. P.], halyna.sudorzhenko@knlu.edu.ua

PROBLEMS OF SEMANTICS, PRAGMATICS AND COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine

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use of *Composition with Guitar* by Albert Gleizes (1881) to foster the learners' discussion of philosophical concepts formulated by Henri Bergson and his influence on the sociohistorical context that ushered in the advent of modernism.

Literature Review

Integrating visual aids into a foreign language classroom has been viewed as a powerful tool to stimulate discussion, foster critical thinking, and facilitate foreign language acquisition. This is especially relevant in the context of teaching upper-intermediate students, whose level of proficiency allows them to hold discussions on challenging philosophical topics with visual or symbolic representations providing valuable support to illustrate abstract concepts.

The use of visual stimuli in FL instruction has recently been in the focus of scholarly attention. For example a detailed review by Liu [7] on the use of visual aids in teaching literature to EFL students concluded that visuals—whether in the form of images, videos, or graphic organizers—enhance comprehension, provoke reflective thinking, and stimulate classroom interaction. While the study's focus was literature rather than philosophy, the pedagogical mechanisms at work are similar, as both disciplines require the interpretation of complex ideas, inference, and abstract reasoning.

Several studies have explored the broader benefits of incorporating art and visual activities into language classrooms. In her article *Art in the Classroom*, Amy Lightfoot [5] advocates for using artworks to develop learners' observation, interpretation, and communication skills. The author argues that although art reduces linguistic pressure by shifting focus from correctness to meaning-making and encourages students to speak more freely, “this bottomless cultural resource is largely underused by many language teachers”. This observation resonates with the research by Zyazyun and Razboinikova [9], who showed that students engaged in conversation about artworks exhibited increased motivation, creativity, and confidence in speaking. Although they were run with secondary school pupils, these findings support the broader applicability of visual art in enhancing the learners' communicative skills. Drawing on plentiful previous research, Amy L. Freyn [4] emphasizes the effectiveness of “multimodality” in language learning, and highlights a much broader view of literacy than the traditional printed text. The author observes that in the contemporary world, oral, visual, gestural, and spatial modes of expression are reshaping the printed word and provide new opportunities to engage students.

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Studies have also pointed to the value of using visual media and creative output, e.g. drawing or collage, to explore metaphor and symbolism, key tools in philosophical analysis. A research by Ling, Ladin, and Lim [6] analyses the positive effects demonstrated by university students' engagement with visual art in mastering figurative language. The visual process helped the learners to externalize abstract ideas and articulate their interpretations in English.

Virtual and immersive environments are also being explored as tools for teaching philosophy in English. Vehrer and Palfalusi [8] research focused on the integration of visual environments and artificial intelligence in teaching philosophy to first-year university students who major in humanities and social sciences. The study showed that immersive visual stimuli—including visual quotations and animated philosophical narratives—enhanced student motivation and engagement with complex philosophical material. The findings also reinforce the pedagogical value of rich visual input for a more effective mastering of philosophical content.

While these papers demonstrate the benefits of using visual stimuli in the ESP and EFL instruction, particularly for stimulating discussion and critical thinking, there remains a noticeable gap in the research literature specifically focused on applying visual art aids in teaching students of philosophy, as mostly the research tends to look into general language learning or literature contexts. Meanwhile, teaching the students of philosophy is supposed to combine challenging philosophy content with the English language input that would meet the level of their proficiency, therefore there is a need for more targeted empirical research that would explore how visual art can be used not only to support language acquisition but also to engage students in philosophical discussion.

Methods

The research relied on the qualitative method of assessment, which includes observation of the students' engagement in doing the task and collecting their oral feedback about how stimulating they found the task for them to participate in the discussion.

Content

The lessons that feature in this article were conducted with an upper-intermediate group of third-year students of the Faculty of Philosophy at KNU, and with the fourth-year students of KNLU, who major in Spanish philology. The former class centred around the philosophy of Henri Bergson, whose cornerstones were the concepts of time and intuition. Bergson introduced the idea of **duration** as real, lived time, which he juxtaposes to abstract, measurable clock time. An important aspect of

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time, emphasized by Bergson, was its fluidity, continuity, interconnectedness between all instances [1]. He also prioritized intuition over intellect and viewed it as a means to grasp reality in its fluid, dynamic nature. Interestingly, his philosophy had a profound impact on the art of surrealism, which can be observed, among other artistic representations, in the canvases of Salvador Dali.

As a warm up at the start of the class the students were asked about their perception of time and if they would agree that the duration of time may feel different depending on circumstances and the psychological state of a person. The next stage featured watching a video on Bergson's ideas about time and intuition and vocabulary work, and then reading a short text about his philosophy, followed with comprehension questions. As a stimulus for speaking activity the students were offered three paintings to discuss in groups: *The Four Seasons* by Giuseppe Arcimboldo, *The Persistence of Memory* by Salvador Dali, and *Composition with Guitar* by Albert Gleizes.

Surprisingly, all the three groups of learners, who were present in the class, went for *Composition with Guitar* to fuel their discussion. The painting depicts the instrument in a fragmented, multi-layered way, as if inviting the viewer to spend some time assembling it back into its integrity. We see the guitar from a number of angles at the same time, which adds to the dynamics of our perception and resonates with Bergson's ideas of human consciousness as a flowing experience, not a collection of static moments. The traditional Cubist technique of breaking objects down into separate geometric forms and presenting them through multiple perspectives simultaneously disrupts the conventional way of seeing things [3], which evokes parallels with the Bergsonian perception of time.

Talking about the painting in the light of Bergson's ideas motivated the students to use the specific vocabulary, relevant in the context of his philosophy: *in the state of flux, fluidity, continuity, static vs dynamic, subjective perception, multiplicity of temporal planes*, etc. and to practice their foreign language skills while formulating complex philosophical ideas. Such challenging tasks, which emerge at the crossroads between philosophy and visual art, prove particularly efficient to internalise both the relevant vocabulary and the philosophical concepts under discussion. By examining the painting through a Bergsonian lens, students can see how philosophical notions manifest themselves in creative works. This approach not only enriches their

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understanding of both fields but also demonstrates how language learning can be integrated with what is termed *higher-order thinking* in Bloom's taxonomy.

Composition with Guitar also proved to be an effective stimulus for speaking activities in a fourth-year class of students majoring in Spanish philology. Abstract and fragmented, this painting naturally fosters interpretation rather than simple description. The students were asked to interpret what they see in the light of the ideas of modernism, which was in the centre of their attention in the previous lesson, and speculate about the meaning of what they see through this optic. This approach stimulates extended speaking, the use of descriptive and speculative language, and interaction, because the students are not afraid to give "wrong" answers. Discussing the painting in Spanish also allows students to practise academic vocabulary related to art, form, and interpretation, which is particularly relevant to their field of study.

The painting also served as a starting point for a discussion of Modernism and the search for new forms in art. Students could express their assumptions as to how traditional representation is broken and perspective is fragmented, and why artists like Picasso rejected realism. By comparing *Composition with Guitar* to realistic art, students could debate the relationship between innovation and tradition and connect visual art to similar developments in modern literature, including Spanish and Latin American modernist movements. In this way, the painting stimulates both meaningful discussion and interdisciplinary thinking while enhancing students' speaking skills.

Thus, the *Composition with Guitar* can serve both as an incentive for discussing complex ideas in an ESP class of philosophy students, as well as in the classroom of students of linguistics. By engaging with this artwork, the learners were encouraged to gain new insights into challenging philosophical notions, and enrich their understanding of art at the same time. Interpreting artworks fosters fluency and spontaneity in speaking, as the students need to express nuanced ideas drawing on the philosophical concepts that feature in university courses.

Conclusions

The study found that integrating visual tasks not only improved communicative competence and engagement, but also encouraged students to take intellectual risks and develop higher-order thinking skills. Such an approach is particularly relevant in a university context, where interpretation and evaluation are central academic practices.

This study supports the idea that philosophy and linguistics students benefit from stimuli that are intellectually relevant and thematically aligned with their field of

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study—an effect that could be achieved through the use of thought-provoking and ambiguous piece of visual art.

To sum it up, the integration of visual aids—particularly visual art—into the ESP or FL classroom offers a rich resource for engaging university students in meaningful discussion. The existing literature provides strong support for its potential benefits in terms of motivation, critical thinking, and language development. However, future studies could focus on researching what concrete pieces of art could be conducive to discussion in the university classes of philosophy or linguistics based on particular subjects which feature in the university syllabus of a certain discipline.

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