

NEW MEDIA IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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Abstract

The submitted paper deals with some advantages of new media in foreign language education, some prerequisites for successful implementation of new media into foreign language teaching/learning, the development of computer - assisted language learning and some aspects of multimedia presentations and their motivating roles in foreign language teaching/learning.

Key words: *new media, foreign language education, foreign language teaching, foreign language learning, didactic technologies, motivation, computer- assisted learning, multimedia*

INTRODUCTION

The growth of computer usage so typical for the last decade gave way to the implementation of computer-based education pervading almost every aspect of our life. Computers offer a broad range of possibilities and, with the introduction of powerful processors and software platforms, the possibilities have been enriched by multimedia and active content.

At present enormous attention is concentrated on the issues of motivation in foreign language teaching/learning and foreign language acquisition. Factors influencing and motivating foreign language education include the situation of the learner, his/her abilities and attitudes to foreign language education, the role and capability of the teacher, teaching/ learning processes, choices of teaching materials and teaching methods/techniques, appropriate multimedia materials, and other considerations.

Our paper focuses on the use of new media in foreign language teaching/learning. In our paper the term new media includes technologies in which the computer plays a central role, e.g. generic computer applications such as a word processor, a browser and presentation software, applications specially designed for computer - assisted language learning and, of course, the Internet. The term information and communication technologies reflects the important role that computers now play in communication, e.g. by e-mail, the Web, by satellite and mobile phones.

1 NEW MEDIA IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

In this part of our paper we focus our attention on the advantages of new media in foreign language education which may be specified as follows:

- they offer interactive, authentic environments,
- they provide faster access to teaching materials,
- they support all language skills – reading, speaking, listening and writing,
- they offer more autonomy on the part of the learner,
- they change the roles of teachers/learners in the teaching/learning process,
- they offer direct feedback,
- they support confidence of a learner.

We can fully support Li Wang (2005:39) who claims: “The best way to learn a language is in interactive, authentic environments. Computer technologies and the Internet are powerful tools for assisting these approaches to language teaching“. Some prerequisites for successful implementation of new media into foreign language teaching/learning may be stated as follows:

- there is a real reason for using them,
- training and support is given to both teachers and students,
- the activities and exercise types are both stimulating and motivating,
- communication is taking place between learners – learners, teachers – learners.

2 DIDACTIC TECHNOLOGIES AS A MOTIVATING FACTOR IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

In the age of new communication and information technologies and deeper contacts with the world, command of foreign languages is essential. Most foreign language teachers accept the view that there is no single best method to teach or learn foreign languages. The world trend in foreign language education can be characterised as teachers' effort both to integrate the best elements of individual methods/techniques and to create optimal methodological and technological syntheses.

According to some authors and reviews of studies (Buttaroni 2007) “e-materials concerning language learning are being more and more intensively produced and launched on the market in the last few years. This phenomenon certainly corresponds to an increased sensitivity and active interest of learners and educational institutions for new learning forms. Considering it from a qualitative point of view, however, it clearly appears that many of the existing e-learning products devoted to foreign languages are not based on valid didactic concepts and display a narrow degree of innovation. As a general tendency, it seems that much more efforts are being devoted to technological aspects like an attractive layout and user friendliness than to criteria of learning effectiveness and speed (e.g. the declared interactivity often reduced to a ‘yes/no feed-back’). At the end, language learning by means of such tools turns out to be a much more difficult and expensive enterprise than using traditional resources. The commercial market orientation in the language e-learning sector seems to be based on a quite restricted conception of language and language acquisition, disregarding the complexity of language use and foreign language learning processes”.

Multimedia used on the basis of computer technology play an important role in foreign language education. Computers in didactic multimedia applications are increasingly becoming elements enabling the dynamic integration of single units or pieces of information otherwise presented separately. The information units which are the elements of such system could have the character of a static image, dynamic image, spoken word (sound), music, etc. Thus, a number of factors influencing educational processes and their results is enormous.

These factors constitute the entry parameters used to manage algorithms in automated computer - assisted instruction. In didactic computer programmes and programme systems in computer - assisted instruction of foreign languages, these algorithms represent the model of a teacher: his/her activities related to the managing and directing of a learner in the process of achieving new knowledge.

Multimedia are perceived as a set of interrelated media for receiving and transferring information in all forms (visual, oral, graphic, iconic, etc.). These media function as a complex and have a broad multi-dimensional character. This capacity enables the realisation of a number of positive, but also negative configurations which can be also used in foreign language education.

A complex multimedia domain requires innovation of didactic materials for foreign language education. These materials include not only visual and auditory teaching aids, but also technological, textbooks and Internet materials.

Multimedia represent a strong motivating factor in foreign language teaching/learning and acquisition. Multimedia system support is one of the aims of education and it can be characterised as

motivated perception of information with respect to the principles of complex perception effectiveness – conditions that are simultaneously appealing to a learner. Acceptance of information on a multimedia basis directly influences its retention because sight, hearing, communication and active work are simultaneously engaged within the action.

Frydrychova Klimova – Poulova (2014:53), in agreement with Dörnyei (2001), “set the following conditions for teachers so that they might make motivation in classes possible:

- Create a pleasant and supportive atmosphere.
- Promote the development of group cohesiveness.
- Increase the students’ expectation of success in particular tasks and in learning in general.
- Make learning stimulating and enjoyable by breaking□the monotony of classroom events.
- Make learning stimulating and enjoyable by increasing□the attractiveness of tasks.
- Make learning stimulating and enjoyable for learners by enlisting them as active task participants.
- Present and administer tasks in a motivating way.
- Provide students with regular experiences of success.
- Build your learners’ confidence by providing regular encouragement.
- Increase student motivation by promoting cooperation among the learners.
- Increase student motivation by actively promoting learner autonomy.
- Increase learner satisfaction.
- Offer rewards in a motivational manner “.

The Internet is an effective motivating tool in foreign language education which offers several reasons for its incorporation into foreign language education. These reasons may be specified as follows:

- authenticity – foreign language teaching/learning is more successful and effective when it is realised in practical, meaningful context,
- literacy – foreign language education with utilization of information and communication technologies helps learners to master communication skills, acquire intercultural competence and social- personal skills required for achieving professional success,
- interactivity – effective foreign language teaching/learning with the usage of the Internet supports interactive communication,
- vitality – the Internet “brings“ to teaching/learning process dynamics, motivation and flexibility,
- empowerment – learners become independent persons cooperating with others in achieving and expressing new knowledge and skills (Levy 2007, Chapelle 2011).

Buttaroni (2007:2) also points out that “the implementation of ICT components in foreign language education should be discussed both on the basis of a well-founded psycholinguistic concept of language acquisition and on the basis of a didactic concept supporting foreign language acquisition which can be defined ‘constructivistic’. The latter includes the following presuppositions:

- the learning environment design focuses on communication and is content-oriented,
- the learners have access to rich input (authentic, complex learning material from the very beginning of the language acquisition process),

- the teacher plays rather a tutor/counsellor role for the learners. His/her support consists in enhancing the individualization of the learning process encouraging and stimulating the creative thinking of learners and collaborative learning,
- the learning process is learner-centred and autonomy-based: the learner is the decision-maker as for contents of language materials, syllabus design, and self-evaluation (with the support of the teacher (tutor or counsellor),
- new technologies are considered a contribution to the improvement of the learning process, essentially in that they offer richer sources of language learning materials and more flexible and open learning tools (support of lexical and grammatical explanations, grammatical analysis of texts, intercultural information, contacts among learners and with native speakers)".

2.1 ICT Language Teachers' Competencies in Foreign Language Education

Fitzpatrick (2004:19) focuses attention on ICT competencies required of language teachers and he claims that "language teachers working in a media-rich environment will, like their counterparts in other disciplines, need to:

- recognise the individual learning problems of learners,
- make a careful and considered choice concerning the use of the media,
- check the truth of information content offered,
- develop efficient search techniques and be capable of conducting effective research with the help of the computer,
- be able to use standard software confidently and competently,
- make wise and critical choices of information found.

These new competencies are often related to what has become known as "the new literacy". Basically, we can identify five types of new literacy in relation to ICT that teachers need to understand and master alongside learners. They are: *scientific, digital, critical, linguistic, and cultural* literacy ".

3 THE USE OF MULTIMEDIA AS A MOTIVATING FACTOR IN GRAMMAR TEACHING AND LEARNING

In multimedia presentations of instructional subject matter (phases of practicing, reinforcement and testing), a teacher can use educational software already at hand, multimedia applications on CD-ROMs, or he/she can create his/her own scenario. Personalized scenarios can be understood as didactic multimedia processing of instructional subject matter (on the basis of computer technologies) created by a teacher, or the usage of the Internet or some other mass media. These possibilities have both advantages and disadvantages.

When a teacher follows his/her own scenario, he/she has the opportunity to concentrate his/her attention on specifically difficult grammatical structures which pose problems for his/her students.

A teacher should be adequately prepared for multimedia presentation of grammatical structures (multimedia used on the basis of computer technology). Most of all, grammar teachers have to realise that multimedia presentation of grammar should be distinctly different from classical or traditional presentations. They should contain the standard static text and graphic information, but also sequences, graphic images, simulation models, video-sequences, dynamic image combined with animation and some others.

A teacher should also take into consideration whether a presented grammatical structure is entirely new for students, or if it draws on knowledge already acquired; whether if it presents a range of grammatical structures and if they are comparable, etc. Equally, students' needs, their strengths and

weaknesses, should be respected in foreign language education. If these conditions are not taken into consideration, learners are demotivated.

Teachers of foreign languages can also use multimedia teaching aids on CD-ROMs, mainly in phases of practicing, reinforcement and testing of grammatical structures. The experience of foreign language teachers shows that some multimedia teaching aids (e.g. CD-ROMs) do not always respect basic didactic psychological and pedagogical principles of good teaching. Didactic multimedia processing of instructional subject matter is based more on an author's intuition than on any theoretical basis grounded in psychological and pedagogical principles of the teaching/learning process. In these cases, information and communication technologies are more misused than used effectively for actual advanced educational achievement. In other words, "modern teaching aids" in an electronic form are often processed by a negatively static way – that is, in a way that disregards pedagogical potentials of the media and at the same time it disregards a genuine learning environment.

The Internet is certainly among those multimedia frequently used in foreign language teaching and learning. It offers a lot of tasks aimed at practicing, reinforcement, and testing of grammatical structures. Computer activities and exercise types used in foreign language teaching/learning may include:

- multiple-choice exercises – they may take a variety of forms, e.g. single-selection, multiple selection, selection by number, selection by clicking on icon, etc.,
- gap-filling exercises – these types of exercises may take a variety of forms, e.g. open input, selection from a set of possible answers, drag-and-drop, etc.,
- matching exercises – in these types of exercises learners have to match two lists of items,
- reordering exercises – they can take several different forms, e.g. vertical reordering (lines in a text), horizontal reordering (words/expressions in a sentence).

When using information and communication technologies in foreign language teaching/learning, learning is focused rather on a learner than a teacher, thus learning becomes more personalized and also more independent, more collaborative and interactive (Frydrychova Klimova – Poulova, 2014).

4 THE USE OF ELECTRONIC TEACHING AIDS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

At present it is typical for creation of teaching aids in foreign language teaching that they are being created on the basis of modern information and communication technologies using integrated audio-visual elements and interaction to a great extent. There is a wide range of multimedia didactic aids for teaching of foreign languages available on the market produced predominantly abroad. However, these aids focus mainly on a common recipient, a general language user without particular specialisation of their foreign language preparation.

Our commercial market lacks electronic didactic materials that would be used for particular specialised purposes. In this context we mean mainly the preparation of foreign language teachers. The offer of teaching aids focusing on language preparation of this specific group is considerably limited, even sporadic.

For this reason we have decided to create a teaching material designed for improving the language preparation of mentioned target group as part of the project called *The Usage of Information and Communication Technologies when Creating Teaching Aids in Foreign Language Teaching at Universities*.

The starting point for this project was the analysis of educational software used in foreign language teaching at universities and its evaluation from the point of view of specific preparation of students, prospective foreign language teachers. The analysis has revealed that many multimedia didactic aids designed for supporting foreign language teaching do not meet the criteria and the needs of students of the target group in question (the students of Faculties of Arts and Faculties of Education, the prospective teachers of English) because these multimedia didactic aids do not ensure their progress in terms of theoretical and practical understanding of studied language.

Furthermore, we have focused on the analysis of chosen linguistic glossaries that are available for the students. The analysis has revealed several deficiencies that could be summarised as follows:

- insufficient definition of terms without giving examples,
- using expressions that are not terms,
- incorrect explanation of terms and their incorrect usage or the failure to use standard linguistic symbols,
- explanation of terms that are too general and not sufficient for their understanding,
- usage of terms that are too specific and very scarcely used or the usage of expressions without their definition and detailed explanation,
- insufficient layout in terms of formal requirements.

For the above-mentioned reasons, the researchers have decided to create a new product whose focus complies with the results of the analysis. The final product is Slovak – English – German – French electronic glossary of linguistic and didactic terms. The aim of this paper is neither to deal with technical aspects of the glossary, nor the technical requirements necessary for its installation. We would like to emphasize that it is important for the language teachers themselves to create the teaching aids that will meet the needs of their students.

CONCLUSION

The paper discussed motivation in foreign language education and foreign language acquisition. Attention was also devoted to the factors influencing and motivating foreign language education. The most important of these factors were considered the following ones: the situation of the learner, his/her abilities and attitudes to foreign language education, the role and capability of the teacher, teaching/ learning processes, choices of teaching materials and teaching methods/techniques, appropriate multimedia materials).

Then, the most important advantages of the use of didactic multimedia system in foreign language education were summarised. It was concluded (and confirmed by several authors) that the use of didactic multimedia system in foreign language education offers the following advantages: an accelerated creativity and motivation for learners, the complex acceptance and transfer of information between teachers and students and also among students, an enhanced interactivity of teaching/learning, immediate feedback, option of self-pacing for students with different learning pace, including the possibility of task repetition and the processing and application of information by learners, and finally, an increased emphasis on a learner's responsibility and role in the process of acquiring new skills and knowledge.

Furthermore, multimedia perceived as a set of interrelated media for accepting and transferring information in all forms (visual, oral, graphic, iconic) and a broad multi-dimensional character of these media were emphasised too.

Consequently, the basic reasons for the incorporation of the Internet into foreign language education were summarised too. These reasons were specified as follows: authenticity, literacy, interactivity, vitality and finally, empowerment.

In the paper we also introduced some computer activities and exercise types used in foreign language teaching/learning, e.g. multiple-choice exercises, gap-filling exercises, matching exercises, reordering exercises.

Finally, crucial attention was devoted to the use and creation of teaching aids in foreign language education. Some multimedia didactic aids available on the commercial market focus mainly on a common recipient, thus they do not meet the criteria and the needs of the students studying English at Faculties of Arts and Faculties of Education – the prospective English teachers. The analysis of chosen linguistic glossaries revealed some deficiencies that were summarised in the paper. The

reasons why the researchers created Slovak – English – German – French electronic glossary of linguistic and didactic terms themselves were explained too.

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