

New Teaching Technologies in Learning Foreign Languages

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Abstract: Limited curriculum hours allocated by Ministry of Education for mastering foreign language acquisition – 180 hours – and low initial language competence of technical university students put forward a task for the Department of foreign languages to perfect language teaching techniques, organize effectively extra-curriculum work of language learners. Multimedia teaching tools contribute greatly to the successful solution of this problem providing challenging and simultaneously feasible learning, systematic and regular progress checking, comfortable moral atmosphere encouraging learners with low language competence to learn dynamically with more efficiency.

Computer-assisted language learning is applicable for self-study in conjunction with classroom training and gives students an opportunity to work at their own pace. Due to individual learning abilities, diligence, and readiness to devote certain amount of time and efforts to language studies students may progress at maximum. Multimedia programs help students to master their pronunciation listening to the speech of native speaker, recording/playing back their own voices, perfecting pronunciation with the help of the visual feedback. By choosing various levels of complexity learners reinforce their vocabulary, grammar, listening and speaking skills in a lively interactive way, i.e. communicating with computer in monologs, dialogs, exercises, games, etc. Effective feedback renders an opportunity to check the correctness of the proposed assignments performance and thus analyze the improvement in four main language skills.

The next step in teaching students foreign languages is transfer from computer-assisted teaching courses with simulated situations, regular feedback and self-checking to real situation videotapes (e.g. Sea Launch). With the help of computer a teacher can choose any fragment of video for the work in the classroom - simultaneous translation, commenting on and discussing real situations, looking for additional information on topic in Internet, etc. Video lessons based on authentic video materials help to improve communicative confidence as well as give insight into cultural and socio-linguistic context.

Keywords: foreign language, computer-based learning, multimedia, teaching.

I. Introduction

Teaching foreign languages at technical University poses for foreign language teachers a number of problems. The students should acquire practical knowledge of foreign language within a limited curriculum hours – 180 academic hours. On completion of the learning course they should develop main language skills in speaking on everyday and professional topics, listening and reading comprehension, writing for professional purposes. It is a hardly achievable task if to take into account that majority of technical students have poor initial receptive and productive skills in language, suffer psychological barriers such as shyness and diffidence when they are asked to stand out and answer before the class, are incapable to work effectively on their own and weakly motivated. The Department of Foreign Languages of our University realized that for attaining goals set by unified state educational program it is necessary to perfect language teaching techniques, organize effectively extra-curriculum work of language learners, rationalize teaching by combining well-established traditional pedagogical methods with innovative learning techniques, using efficiently interactive multimedia, integrating them into overall teaching process.

2. Multimedia teaching

The advantages of modern multimedia learning tools are multiple and undisputable. Computer-assisted learning allows to individualize and differentiate language acquisition, adapts it to the needs and goals of each learner, acts upon different perception channels responsible for apprehension of language material, reduces the duration of

language training, provides effective feedback and objective evaluation of learner's progress, allows to choose the pace and complexity levels, engages students to participate actively in language exploration, etc. Thus, multimedia teaching tools contribute greatly to challenging and simultaneously feasible learning, systematic and regular progress checking, comfortable moral atmosphere encouraging learners to learn dynamically and gain confidence.

Computer-assisted language learning creates favorable premises for self-study in a user-friendly environment, e.g. in CD-ROMs "Learn to Speak English", "Triple Play". Simple controls provide easy navigation to any point of training program. Self-paced instructional design allows the student to choose both pace and direction of the course by repeating, reviewing, advancing as many times as desired. Due to individual learning abilities, diligence, and readiness to devote certain amount of time and efforts to language studies students progress at maximum.

2.1. Mastering Pronunciation

Multimedia programs, e.g. "Pronunciation Guide", "SoundStart", help students to master their pronunciation listening to the native speaker's pronunciation. Learners get acquainted with all English sounds presented separately and in words. Learners can see on the animated side cross-section view of mouth and tongue and front view of the instructor's mouth how to articulate sounds properly. Students can record, play back and compare their pronunciation with instructor's one, perfecting pronunciation with the help of the visual feedback. The next step is mastering main positional variants of English sounds (allophones) in sample and comparative words. Practicing English sounds in different sentences (contexts) completes sounds pronunciation training. Learner has an opportunity to set options from relaxed to strict speech recognition. After substantial training even adult learners overcome the psychological barrier of speaking in public, gain confidence for interactive group work.

2.2. Reinforcing Word Power

Multimedia means provide comprehensive and thorough vocabulary mastering, since a new word is presented in many ways. It is written, interpreted through other words, illustrated by a picture, spoken, used in different sound recorded contexts, repeated many times in a variety of assignments and games, reviewed in tests and quizzes. The set of exercises for memorizing vocabulary may offer the following assignments to the users:

- fill gaps in the text with new words,
- fill sound complexes with the missing letters,
- correct misspelled words,
- spell transcribed words,
- unscramble letters in new words,
- match words with similar and opposite meanings (synonyms and antonyms),
- match words with their definitions, etc.

Naturally, every teacher may reinforce vocabulary by additional training, e.g. asking students to write an accomplished story using new words, to choose the best suiting word to complete a sentence, to take an analogy quiz. In analogy quiz the learner has to decide on relationship between first pair of words (synonyms or antonyms), then make a correct match for the third word which has the same relationship to one of several offered words (a-d):
irritate : annoy :: annals :

a. stories b. plants c. records d. hopes.

The relationship between "irritate" and "annoy" is synonymous, so the word "annals" would match with its synonym "records" (d).

It was proved that linguistic memory differs from memorizing images presented in pictures. Only 4 to 6 linguistic images can be memorized without further repeating and reviewing. It is easier to memorize the words that are associated with visual images. More precise and comprehensive initial perception results in better reproduction. Comprehensive perception serves as a bridge between different mechanisms of information memorizing. These considerations are completely in line with Howard Gardener's theory of Multiple Intelligences: Visual/Spatial, Bodily/Kinesthetic, Musical, Natural, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, Verbal/Linguistic and Logical/Mathematical. Simultaneous appealing to these intelligences will enhance learner's knowledge, reinforce their word power in particular. That is why combination of audio means with visual aids, animation and visual images offered by computer opens new perspectives in forming language competence. The same approach holds true for mastering grammar and developing main language skills.

2.3. Gaining Grammar Proficiency

At the initial stages of language learning the focus is on mastering principal language structures (Basic Grammar – verb system, nouns, pronouns, word order within English clause multifunctional ‘it’, articles and other determiners, propositions) and working vocabulary.

Teaching grammar with the help of structural models proves to be very useful, because it helps to cognize the whole (complicated) through investigation of the separate (and simple). The structures are presented in a maximally generalized and concise form. The following structural and semantic characteristics are marked out:

- formal marks of grammatical form;
- formal distributional characteristics that make it possible to identify and single out the grammatical target form within the sentence;
- generalized meaning of the grammatical model.

Presenting grammar structures in a form of tables, schemes, formulae, etc. contributes to quicker visual perception, ability to identify forms and structures by formal markers, quicker skills forming, especially when the learners are students of technical departments. There three main subsequent steps:

- introduction, comprehension of certain grammatical forms through structural models;
- consolidation and reproduction of grammatical target forms in new sentences similar to the previously learnt ones;
- automation of skills in grammar. At this stage there is a transfer from learning grammatical complexes to their usage in speech.

Multimedia teaching courses cope successfully with these three stages of grammar acquisition, with the help of numerous exercises, games, simulated communicative situations they steadily shift the focus of learners’ attention from language form to language use and hem for participating in real communicative situations.

2.4. Developing Language Skills

Alongside with mastering working vocabulary and grammar much of their time students are learning how to use what they already know. At this stage focus is shifted from language form to language use. The stress from language-centered approach is shifted to skills-shifted approach, i.e. the emphasis is not on whether students remember all the word, phrases and structures they’ve learnt, but whether they can communicate creating utterances of their own in the target language with the help of previously learnt language material.

It is useful to differentiate learners’ competence, i.e. what they are able to do, and learners’ performance, i.e. what they actually do. The interaction of competence and performance results in language proficiency. Language competence isn’t built exclusively of vocabulary and grammar, but of knowledge of discourse, or how language is organized to present necessary information in a certain communicative situation. Students should learn to identify communicative situation and coordinate given in it information within the limits of the full speech environment, context of the situation. Thus, communicative competence incorporates grammatical competence and ability to cover discourse, socio-linguistic and strategic aspects.

Special attention should be paid to working out ways to teach students communicative skills because the way people use language is different from the way people learn it. It is not sufficient to explain how to use language for communicative purposes, it is necessary to involve students into a truly communicative setting, where their language competence adapt itself to informational needs of a certain situation, linguistically and extra-linguistically. Each learner is to participate and interact to the fullest in the target language to gain communicative proficiency. The viewpoint expressed in the statement “ Tell me, and I forget. Show me, and I understand. Involve me, and I remember” holds true.

Successful computer-assisted learning programs offer realistic role-playing practice that simulates realistic situations and real-life interactions. Voice input (rather than keyboard or mouth input) has enhanced active learning in simulated situations. The most appropriate are the programs that serve as a communication partner to a learner. It is opportunity of bilateral communication that makes multimedia teaching so popular these days. Interacting with a computer learners begin to explore target language, analyzing, correcting, constructing and reconstructing their language resources. The task of a teacher is to focus attention on those language forms which students should be aware of and which have their nuances of usage in communication. A premium is set on fluency and prompt response to linguistic and extra-linguistic stimuli.

Building up reproductive communicative skills – speaking and writing – is interconnected in foreign language classroom, though traditionally the share of classroom time dedicated to development of writing skills has been reduced in favor of speaking, which is not fair if we take into account the importance of writing activities for the future careers of University graduates. On different stages and levels of teaching it is necessary to provide training in both writing and written communication. Training in writing envisages spelling, punctuation acquisition, use of

grammatical constructions, performing exercises in a written form. Training in written communication includes exercises on writing messages called forth by reading, listening, spoken communication. Beginners and intermediate level students perform simple controlled assignments on writing. Computer offers immediate evaluation of the performance and prompts when needed. Special teaching programs on business, social, technical writing illustrates the differences in structure, nature and styles of different written messages.

Developing perceptive skills of reading and listening comprehension has its specifics. First of all it is primarily a matter of developing appropriate comprehension strategies, searching for the key to extract information. The assignments for the intermediate students focus on grammatical structures and lexical units, since rapid grammar and word a premise of mature independent reading in future. Already at the early stages of learning students should be oriented to determine a strategy of reading:

- reading for purpose (to find an answer to the question, to find necessary data);
- skimming reading;
- scanning reading;
- grouping ideas, etc.

As far as we learn to read by reading students are encouraged to read both at the classroom and at home. Their sources for reading are books, periodicals, computer networks.

It is necessary to specially mention that during many years in Ukraine a curious imbalance has persisted in the teaching of communicative skills. All the emphasis was laid on the development of speaking and reading proficiency whereas explicit teaching of the comprehension of spoken language has been neglected. It resulted in serious problems learners face while communicating with native speakers. Listening comprehension is a process which relies on active thinking, not passive perception of spoken sound complexes. Computer courses may serve as sources of authentic interesting information, teacher helps students to master auditing skills. The following strategies may be of help in understanding spoken speech.

1. Concentrate on the content of the message, not on a language by which it is conveyed.
2. Try to predict what speaker wants to say.
3. Compare your suggestion with what was said.
4. Try to fulfill information gaps judging from the known portions of the message.
5. Involve into guess brainwork your knowledge of language, topic, context, personal experience.
6. Pay attention to the intonation patterns, pause distribution, logical stresses and other prosody clues.

Closed caption mode in some of computer assisted teaching courses may be widely used for training auditing skills alongside with exercises on filling gaps while listening and assignments on prediction. The point is in teaching students not to panic in case they can't identify certain sound complexes in spoken utterances. Ability to single out the most important pieces of information due to acquired techniques of identification and interpretation of spoken language increases student's confidence which is a very important psychological premise for successful "ear tuning" to native spoken English.

Computer-assisted learning is a mighty teaching tool suitable for students' learning on their own. Still the instructive and managing role of language teachers is important. They are responsible for overcoming learners' communicative failures. Special attention they should pay to interactive, pragmatic, semantic aspects of communication. It is also important to analyze the appearance of communicative mistakes and find ways to correct them.

3. Enhancement of Language Proficiency Through Multimedia Sources (Video, Satellite TV, video CDs, Computer Networks, Internet)

Computer-assisted teaching courses, which provide simulated situations and regular feedback for self-checking prepare learners to further perfection of their language knowledge. Advanced learners are able to perform comprehensive general skills assignments, concerning real-life situations presented in video.

Video lessons both help to improve communicative skills and give insight into cultural life and socio-linguistic context. They motivate learning and make it enjoyable. To turn viewing into a language learning experience teacher should activate students' background knowledge. Before watching a film learners are asked to guess what type of film it'll be (comedy, sci-fi, documentary, thriller, action story...), what it'll be about, etc. Sometimes a certain reading assignment based on the same theme as the video, introduce students to necessary language material and range of raised problems. The content and character of video material determine a set of tasks to be solved. For example, "Forest Gump" provides abundant source of information on American English, its dialects and idiolects, ways of life, prominent cultural and historical milestones in the life of the USA. The music accompanying the film may be considered as one of the main characters. Each song is associated in the consciousness of Americans with

certain events in cultural, public life of the country and private lives of people. Each of these aspects is worth special exploration. It is desirable to offer students first to read Winston Groom's book "Gump & Co." or listen to the audio version "Forest Gump" and then show the film straight through so as not to destroy the charm and its entity. After watching the whole film it may be segmented for solving specific problems. Students may compare the film with the book or audio version, dramatize certain scenes, sound actions of the characters, debate the thoughts expressed in the film (e.g. famous expression "Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get") in oral or written form. These activities aim at further perfection of communicative skills, gaining cultural sensitivity of students. To sum up the work with the film the students are offered to put down their impressions and feelings evoked by listening to the sound track (songs and music) of the film. Commercials presented at Golden Clio may serve not only as source of language material but as an illustration of good advertisements. Satellite television supply teachers with all kind of authentic video materials – news, talk shows, sit-coms, etc. Video brings a lot of fun and action into the classroom. Memorable video motivates learning, awakes imagination, brings "real life" into the classroom, presents language in natural socio-linguistic environment. Effectively organized before-, while- and after-viewing activities greatly contribute to the development of communicative proficiency in a meaningful, exciting way. Documentary video CDs (e.g. "Sea Launch") provide interesting information and impetus for discussion in a classroom of technical students. The digital films are very convenient because they may be easily segmented for learning purposes.

Computer networks, and Internet as a global network in particular, are inexhaustible resources of all kinds of information. Navigating Internet computer users practice their English, because about 80% of its information resources are in English, and simultaneously acquire necessary special information, get acquainted with the hottest news (e.g. "Real Player" program) in different spheres of human life: politics, science, entertainment, etc. Computer-assisted teaching courses, which provide simulated situations and regular feedback for self-checking prepare learners to further perfection of their language knowledge. On different websites students can find reference materials in grammar, style, electronic dictionaries (e.g. Webster), thesauruses, programs for editing and polishing scientific documents, business correspondence patterns, etc. Many of the websites are performed in an interactive regime. All these facilities in combination with teleconferencing force students to communicate in real life situations in real time and make language learning highly motivated, effective and a lot of fun.

4. Conclusions

The advantages of modern multimedia learning tools are multiple and undisputable. Computer-assisted learning allows to individualize and differentiate language acquisition, adapts it to the needs and goals of each learner, acts upon different perception channels responsible for apprehension of language material, reduces the duration of language training, provides effective feedback and objective evaluation of learner's progress, allows to choose the pace and complexity levels, engages students to participate actively in language exploration, provides challenging and simultaneously feasible learning. Computer-assisted courses, which provide simulated situations and regular feedback for self-checking prepare learners to further perfection of their language knowledge.

Use of video, satellite television, video CDs, Internet provides opportunities for enhancement of language proficiency. More so, for young people psychologically the computer, alongside with computer networks and other innovative information technologies, has long acquired the status of the main and indispensable information source, daily assistant, user friendly communication partner.