ICT TECHNOLOGIES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING: MODERN EDUCATIONAL PLATFORMS AS MOTIVATION TOOLS IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Ekaterina Zvereva, Kamo Chilingaryan
RUDN University (RUSSIAN FEDERATION)

Abstract

The article analyses the role and importance of the multimedia technology as an essential resource and one of the leading tools of organization of educational process, providing comprehensive training to a foreign language, with undisputable use of traditional forms and techniques. Multimedia technologies are developing rapidly, embracing new areas of everyday life. They fulfil the primary task - maximum boosting of students’ autonomy and improving the quality of this autonomy; teaching them how to make decisions about what, how and when to study. This means two things: “to be able to learn” and have the necessary didactic materials.

The author states the importance of certain computer programs, such as Watch2gether, ViewPure or Safeshare. Multimedia is an undisputable advantage in preparing for workshops and/or scientific conferences as the network is an infinite source of materials, and through the system links, the student is redirected to more and more sources of information: thus, obtaining of knowledge becomes continuous and exciting.

In today’s society, knowledge is no longer the property of the teacher only. It is a collective product, and being created from the multimedia by means of synthesis of other prior knowledge, it can be returned to the same multimedia network and be made available to other users. The teacher turns into a conductor and an assistant, whereas the student develops independently.

Keywords: multimedia technology, multimedia, autonomy, motivation, life, video hosting, didactics.

1 MULTIMEDIA EVERYWHERE

In the modern era the development of any civilized society is closely connected with the use of rapidly updated computer technology. It is undisputable that this powerful resource is widely used in the educational process, including foreign languages. It is no coincidence that education is on one of the first places where latest computer multimedia training systems are implemented. Moreover, the issue of using multimedia in education has gained public and political significance. The criteria for the successful implementation of the program is to increase the proportion of the high school graduates who have mastered the computer and distance learning methods, as well as increase the number of educational institutions with access to local networks for educational purposes. We can suggest that multimedia technologies and their successful implementation is the core of this program.

It should be noted that under the multimedia technology in the broad sense we mean various ways of learning: text, graphics, music, video and animation in interactive mode.

Multimedia technologies are all around in every area of our lives, fully covering the educational process: interactive programs in the Internet, computer network via wireless connection, electronic boards and databases have become an integral part of academic life and an indispensable tool both for teachers and students. Today even the sceptics recognize the benefits of multimedia technologies and their unlimited possibilities in the educational process as a whole, as well as in the field of teaching foreign languages. Integrating images, sounds and texts, multimedia promote autonomy for the learners, significantly improving their motivation and understanding, and their subsequent oral reproduction of speech [1, p. 48].

1.1 Creating motivation

With the constructivist point of view, an individual builds his/her own knowledge by integrating new concepts, ideas and information on the basis of existing knowledge. Consequently, the activities of the trainer (teacher) should influence the student’s personal development area. According to M.Solino Paso, “in order the training to be constructive, there are two key points: it must be relevant, i.e. all
language activity and linguistic material should be authentic and provide useful knowledge for the individual and, second, to trainee ought to accept his active role [2, p. 114] Thus, the multimedia technology must fulfill their primary task – to maximum boost the student’s autonomy and improve the quality of this autonomy; to teach him to make decisions on what, how and when to study. This means two things: "to be able to learn" and have the necessary didactic material.

Of course, the multimedia bears an extraordinary motivational resource. For the majority of students who are accustomed to the traditional methods of learning a foreign language, the mere presence of a computer or the internet in the language classroom is a factor, bringing satisfaction and creating a positive attitude. V. Ronsel Vega considers motivation as a determinant of academic performance and efficiency [3, p. 86]. We understand motivation as those incentives, needs or desires that the student has in studying and mastering the advanced level of the target language. According to Garcia S. Luján "in the process of mastering a foreign language motivation is a more significant factor than, for example, the mind" [4, p. 272]. Motivation is inextricably linked with the increase in student self-esteem, the necessity to show him/her that he/she is able to perform a certain task. As a perfect form of motivation, we can see the use of those situations in which the student feels comfortable. Multimedia technologies are just such a situation. Modern students are well aware of these technologies and therefore, language training will be in their zone of comfort and their own personal development. In addition, with the help of multimedia we can use a fully authentic material, to put the student in a real situation where he will not feel himself/herself a student but a professional. For students studying legal translation it could be an interactive part in the court session, witness interviewing, etc.

In addition, most researchers agree on unconditional motivating effect, which is a graphical image, picture, significantly contributing to the retention of information [5, p. 37]. When using the multimedia as a motivating element we can also take into account the concept of educational games as a teaching model. In the game, which must completely be subordinate to the training purposes, knowledge can also be obtained without causing such fatigue, as it might be seen using traditional methods. One should not deny the fact that one of the engines of any process of learning, including language learning, is curiosity. It makes no sense to force students to memorize a particular topic or text that he/she may forget two days after the exam. The key to success, in our view, is to offer the student to develop the topic he is interested in. Thus, if my students are interested in civil law, then working with multimedia sources in this area will help them to memorize the proper legal terminology. The authors well described this topic in their previous work [6, pp. 88-98].

1.1.1 Programs to be considered

Multimedia also allows the use of constantly updated, relevant information. As an example, the opportunity to listen to political debate or discourse at advanced level that is done in real time, to feel as a part of the social and cultural environment, to integrate into it. As it was rightly pointed by M. Kutjevo, "a huge benefit can be obtained from the audio materials of outstanding people of Hispanic world, delivering speeches to the audience of many thousands" [7, p.64-65]. Undoubtedly, watching movies or listening to audio should be carefully prepared by the teacher, in order not to destroy the very motivation, which is at stake. Misunderstanding of a fragment may cause a backlash and produce a sense of frustration. Besides, linguistic competence of the participants can be uneven, so the subject of the material should be carefully designed in the preliminary optional exercises and texts.

An important factor is the duration of a video. Modern technology allows the teachers to create their own video of a required duration. For example, if the video of a court session lasts one hour, then the teacher can choose the most interesting episodes and create his own "short film." For these purposes, you can use such programs as TubeChop, Snipsnip y Splicid or DragonTape, allowing to combine different videos. Another opportunity is teaching the group on-line, if its members are in different locations. Watch2gether program can be seen as one of the best. Sometimes the existing online videos are overloaded with commercials. To avoid students’ being distracted, the teacher may resort to ViewPure or Safeshare programs to clear the contents of the video. Of course, watching of authentic materials will be assessed by the younger generation as more interesting than traditional reading of the text and, in our opinion, should improve the quality of mastering the language. Students may be asked to create and upload their own educational videos which may allow them (staying in area of their common competence, usually used for entertainment) be included in the process of language acquisition.
2 INTEGRATING COMPUTER

The teacher can also use subtitles to ease understanding. It should be noted that the work with subtitles can be viewed as an interesting methodological resource [Kutjevo, p.64-65] because they significantly affect the perception of strange sounding statements. Moreover, modern technologies allow to personalize subtitles' usage so that only those students who face certain difficulties could use them, while the rest of the group will be working with the original video. However, as S. Stempleski rightly pointed, we should not forget that it is the teacher, but not multimedia, who provides a situation where video is fruitful for the language learning process [8, p. 61].

Today, there are special programs ELAO (CALL - in the original English version), i.e. language training programs, supported by the computer. Their goal is to integrate fully the computer in the didactics of foreign language teaching. Each year, more and more multimedia products appear in the market. They are oriented to self-mastery of the language, which means that multimedia has a powerful motivating influence. These courses do not always meet the needs of all students, which cause an increase in the number of copyright courses. Then teachers adapt the teaching material under particular group needs, which takes into account the individual characteristics of students, their interests. It also serves as a motivating factor. For example, if one of our students is interested in space law, the other – in the system of bailiffs, then the inclusion of these topics in language training, selection of authentic language materials from the multimedia resources that reflect exactly the professional specificity, will unconditionally be a motivating factor for the acquisition of linguistic competence in the target language.

2.1 Collaboration

Multimedia is an undisputed advantage in preparing for the sessions and scientific conferences, as the net is an inexhaustible source of materials: through the system of links the student is redirected to more and more sources of information, the acquisition of knowledge becomes continuous and exciting.

In addition, through the network students can carry on communication in forums with their peers - native speakers, namely, to develop their spoken language, fully used by participants in social networking. Using social networks in the target language where the average student is spending a lot of time, one gets an extra motivation to learn the language for the purpose of communication. An interesting example of the use of social networking for education is the initiative of the Brazilian Academy of language "Red Ballon", which suggested its students to "check" the accounts of their favourite singers and actors in Twitter, and to correct their spelling and grammatical errors. This exercise was designed to improve the English language proficiency of the Academy students.

When discussing the use of different types of networks we should mention Web 2.0, which many researchers qualify as a "cooperation network" (la red colaborativa), based on the establishment of jointly acquired knowledge, which is built in the community of users. F. Herrera Jimenez, in particular, writes about it, exploring the possibility of using Web 2.0 [9, p. 52]. Being based on the constructivist approach to learning, Web 2.0 combines the new technology training, independent work and construction of their own knowledge. In our opinion, Web 2.0 is a set of sophisticated and appropriately organized tools that ensure the publication, processing and management of the content of published materials and, at the same time, this platform makes it possible to create a "new collective knowledge" based on various individual unstructured contributions. This is also, in our opinion, an extremely motivating moment, allowing each participant to feel like a creator of knowledge, to acquire an active role in the learning process and learning the language.

2.1.1 Electronic portfolio

The European system of education is now widely using the term "portfolio". Electronic Portfolio was born as a presentation of the results and was more focused on the process than on the product. Today, the portfolio has become widespread as an alternative strategy for the assessment of knowledge and development of skills and competencies associated with reading and writing. If we talk about the educational system, then the issue is the totality of documents or documentary texts and samples, confirming the education of an individual, namely, his/her educational background. The portfolio contains the best language products that were created by the individual in the course of a particular educational program, as well as the author's reflections regarding the strengths and weaknesses of these products [10, p. 201]. In the European system of education there is the so-called el Portfolio Europeo de las Lenguas (European Language Portfolio), which is a personal document in
which each person can record his experience in language learning and position himself/herself as an autonomous language learner throughout his life.

We would also mention such a thing as wikis, which could be defined as a collective edition of an encyclopaedia on a voluntary basis, which does not pursue profit. Their use in the classroom allows students to create their own knowledge. As another example of web sites involving cooperation can be assumed podcasting, allowing to subscribe to the audio archives, that in terms of language learning could be regarded as audio lessons; subscription to the content or news in RSS format, or use of such well-known video hosting as Youtube or Flickr.

Among multimedia resources, one should note virtual learning platforms. These platforms are not only a kind of archive for materials and data, but they facilitate their organization and planning, contribute to a more complete study of the disciplines and their evaluation. Educational platforms contribute to the development of the students’ more active and independent position since they combine multimedia format and non-linear structural access to information. As an example of such a platform can be called the Moodle system that has been successfully used in Spanish universities, such as University of Valladolid and Extremadura. I. Gómez Rey notes the following benefits of this educational platform: flexibility of its modules, supporting any kind of learning activity; ease of use, international participants; continuous creation and updating of modules and versions based on suggestions of the users themselves [11, p. 174].

2.1.2 Multimedia resources

It is worth mentioning a new educational resource in Spanish, created by Google in 2014. It is a new page within the video portal called Youtube EDU [12], where a selection of videos in Spanish are presented, which allows to study the relevant sections: social and humanitarian science, administrative services, etc. All videos are subtitled in Spanish. The idea is very interesting because students will not have to spend a lot of time to look up for topics, and will be able to refer to the section of interest. However, Google assures that its specialists will thoroughly monitor the quality and content of information.

When considering the use of multimedia resources in the educational process, we must not ignore the relationship of the trainer and the trainee. In the modern teaching model of these relations, developing under the influence of multimedia technologies the traditional roles of teacher and student are changing. The teacher is no longer the sole source of information and an undisputed authority. He turns into a kind of counsellor, helper, guide, assisting to find a path in the sea of information. As M. Warschauer and P. Whitaker noted, that a teacher turns from being a wise man into a conductor - not "a sage on the stage", but a "guide on the side" [13, p. 31]. At the same time students, in turn, become the central figure of the education process - from passive recipients of information they become builders, designers, protagonists of their own knowledge. According to T. Aslamova, the teacher is increasingly taking on the role of a tutor who provides the students the necessary assistance and support. Therefore, a foreign language lesson these days is becoming "an event in the knowledge chain, or more precisely, research of the professional world. <...> Whatever property is possessed by this or that means of education or information environment <...> the Internet, with its capabilities and resources is a means of implementing of these goals and objectives "[14, p. 80].

3 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

These new realities dictate the need for appropriate training and retraining of the teaching staff. In order to attract and motivate their students, teachers need to be able to navigate in the world of multimedia technology. The teacher, of course, does not necessarily need to be a computer professional, but he/she has to understand those endless teaching opportunities that multimedia technology can bring into a language audience. However, many teachers still adhere to traditional methods. Specialized professional forums and virtual classrooms might influence the situation and could enable the teachers to exchange experience, where each of them would not feel as an isolated individual, but a part of professional a community. This is the only possible way to overcome the natural fear of technological challenges and technological innovations in which our students are often more experienced than we are.

Summing up, the authors would like to emphasize once again that in today's society knowledge is no longer the property of only the teacher or has a feature of unidirectional transmission: teacher - student. Knowledge is a collective product, and being created based on pre-extracted information from the multimedia by means of the synthesis of other prior knowledge, it can be returned to the same
multimedia network, becoming available to other users. The teacher turns into a conductor and an assistant, developing the independence of students. The teacher should constantly monitor all the innovations in technological progress with a view to their application in their professional activity to achieve maximum effectiveness of the educational process. Nevertheless, one should not over-exaggerate the role of multimedia technologies. They are only one of the means of educational methods providing that the daily activities of the teacher should be integrated into the educational programs in a humble and sensible way.

The use of multimedia resources as one of the leading resources for organization of educational process provides a unique opportunity for complex learning of a foreign language with the unconditional use of traditional forms of learning.

REFERENCES


