THE USE OF THE INSTAGRAM PLATFORM AND TEXT MESSENGERS IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION

N. Mammadova, A. Pogrebnaya

Moscow State Institute of International Relations (RUSSIAN FEDERATION)

Abstract

Our research is aimed at the identifying the particularities of teaching foreign languages by means of interactive applications such as Instagram and text messengers (specifically Whatsapp). In this article we distinguished the main advantages of the present applications: spatial intelligence, inclusiveness and the element of permanent presence in the learning process, the possibility of transferring a part of classroom teaching into online space, the motivation of the profile, the linguistic means used for encouraging individuals to be more active and keen while learning foreign languages.

Moreover, we pointed out the problems of time-management and time refocusing in the learning process. Despite the fact that there are many obvious advantages of the Instagram and text messengers we have identified the obstacles, which can influence the quality of the learning process. Particularly, we highlighted the problem of assessment and the monitoring of the material and the professionalism of the teacher who is running the Instagram profile.

Keywords: instagram, text messengers, interactive platforms, applications, foreign languages.

1 INTRODUCTION

Modern education should timely respond to changes in the society. New worldwide tendencies and dynamic pace of life force teachers to implement innovative instruments while teaching foreign languages. One of the latest ingenious applications in this sphere are such platforms as the Instagram and texting messengers, particularly Whatsapp. The purpose of this research is to indicate advantages, characteristics and obstacles of teaching foreign languages using the above-mentioned applications.

2 METHODOLOGY

While teaching at our university we have access to students of different age groups, interests and backgrounds, which helped us to use qualitative techniques in the frames of our research. The total number of students taking part in the discussion was 110. At the beginning of the lesson which was devoted to memorizing idioms we showed them 2 groups of idioms from two different sources: the first set of idioms was the definition from an English dictionary and the other one was from the Instagram page with the colorful picture illustrating the idiom with the comments by the owner of the page. We asked the students to remember them. Therefore, at the end of the lesson the students were asked to reproduce the same idioms, and they managed to memorize only the ones displayed on the Instagram page. We discussed the reasons of this phenomenon and the students had various explanations: “The definition on the Instagram was humorous”, “the picture was eye-catching”, “the example was from my favorite movie”, “The letters were large and colorful, the same with the picture”.

3 RESULTS

Over the last decade people have perceived the information in the modern world predominantly by means of visual communication. Psychologists claim that the modern generation is unable to process certain kinds of information without visual support. Their comprehension is focused on bright images, fragmentation, conciseness and unusual, captivating layout of material. Practically all the information is presented in the form of schemes, graphs, charts, and graphic images. For that very reason many teachers have turned to the Instagram, which helps realize the basic principles of teaching foreign languages – spatial intelligence and visualization.
Visualization in education is a process of presenting information by means of images to maximize the level of comprehension and to attribute a visual shape to any object, subject or process. Having analyzed a number of works by D.A. Rukosueva, we can distinguish the following techniques and methods of visualization [1] in reference to teaching material: designer text presentation (size of letters, font color, frames), structuralization of information (spider web schemes, pie diagrams etc.), “information folding” (popups, hashtags, three-dimensional texts) and graphic images.

1 A good example of visualization on the Instagram is learning of phrasal verbs. They are presented in photographic images, which builds very strong links of an image and its meaning in our consciousness. Another strong tool of visualization on the Instagram is color. It has one of the strongest influences on human’s subconscious perception of the information. The Instagram successfully uses color scheme in exercises on memorizing new vocabulary units “Fig. 1”. The additional function carousel serves a quick change of images in the frames of one topic: kinds of sport, clothes, transport, ecology, daily routine and etc., which is perceived by the consciousness much faster than the sound signal of a vocabulary unit.

![Figure 1. Color and topic scheme](image)

Consequently, visualization is an integral tool that is to be mastered by any teacher for successful fulfillment of learning goals and objectives [3]. The interactive approach to the learning process also requires to activate spatial intelligence which means the ability to think visually in three dimensions, to analyze color, shapes, lines, the location of the objects in space.

2 The popularity of the Instagram as a way of learning foreign languages has become widespread due to several factors. Inclusiveness and accessibility for people of different abilities, backgrounds and level of knowledge make it one of the most attractive sources of improving language skills. Free subscription gives access to exclusive and original material, brilliant ideas and lives communication and guidance from teachers and tutors all over the world. Interactive approach to different tasks is also considered an important factor of popularity. For example, administrators of Idiom.Lands publish one idiom a day followed by the definition of the idiom. The next step is attaching a scene from the movie where this idiom was used “Fig. 2”. The followers immediately start associating the idiom with the movie and are more likely to remember it and use it in appropriate real life situations.
The Instagram is also being developed as a business platform. Alongside with open access profiles, some teaching communities create accounts with a limited number of followers, where they are offered to purchase an online course or join live tuition groups according to their language learning purpose. Whatsapp messenger is usually used for video and audio calls, voice messages making the whole educational process subject to constant control by tutors. For instance, voice messages are really helpful when giving comments and remarks to the assignments sent by email instead of texting back. It is less time-consuming for both, the teacher and the student.

Moreover, specific features of the Instagram platform and Whatsapp bring the component of permanent presence of the teacher into the process of teaching. One can send voice messages and get a response in the same format in separate chats by the means of text messenger Whatsapp. It is a well-known fact that many teachers actively make use of this function while commenting and correcting mistakes of the students in exercises they send to their tutors. Therefore, he or she can train the followers from any time zone not being constantly online in addition paying appropriate attention to all the learners.

The possibility of learning grammar constructions with the help of the Instagram can be controversial. Undoubtedly, it is impossible to study grammar material in a comprehensive manner, although some tutors suggest joining marathons or live streams on some specific grammar topics, for instance, modals verbs, use of tense forms or articles.

The indisputable advantage of using the Instagram and text messengers in learning foreign languages is a relief of psychological stress and tension that often accompanies traditional educational process [6]. There is no entrance testing to start following the Instagram language profile, no pressure from teachers or other participants. In case the follower understands that the profile doesn’t meet his or her needs, level or requirements he or she is able to “unfollow” it without any losses or consequences. Unless the followers join some special course or program in the profile, they are not given any assessment of their knowledge or progress, which also excludes the fear of getting a bad score or disappointment. Interestingly enough, practically all the above mentioned advantages of learning foreign languages with the help of the Instagram can be easily turned into disadvantages. The absence of assessment, strict control and pressure may lead to lack of commitment and neglect of studies. In addition the Instagram allows us to transfer part of the classroom teaching into the interactive space, conducting linguistic marathons, everyday challenges, contests and etc.
Most of the Instagram owners provide real-time assistance for the learners to spend their time meaningfully using social networks, in so doing, students are not deprived of the role-playing and competition while learning. For instance, Helen Ruvel, the owner of one of the Instagram pages, periodically conduct linguistic marathons, the main objectives of which are followings: to develop the habit of regular trainings including self-training, to motivate students to devote sufficient time to study languages, to improve all the aspects of language proficiency including speaking, vocabulary and grammar [5]. It should be taken into consideration that studying a language during the marathon is not just a rote learning of words or phrases or monotonous fulfillment of home assignments but a very entertaining and competitive process.

In comparison to manuals for learning foreign languages, the Instagram, and text messengers allow less formal approach to studying process, thus providing more motivation for students. In the process of forming motivation it is very important for a teacher to monitor feedback, to contact all the students individually using evaluative vocabulary, which includes encouragement and approval with the help of widespread popular emoticons. Taking into consideration a remote job of a teacher, he or she needs to resort to some kinds of marketing communications, for instance incentive patterns or imperatives.

The imperatives are the most effective means of establishing contact during long-distance dialogues, as they are directly addressed to the followers. The main objective of the imperative is to motivate profile viewers to action or to carrying out the tasks given. The most common imperatives in the Instagram profiles for learning foreign languages are the following: join, agree, learn, participate, win, think over, answer a question, ask me a question and etc.

There is another method of having an effective impact on students as using interrogative sentences. A question is an essential part of establishing dialogue between a teacher and a student. Asking a question one can begin a new discussion topic, receive the information about followers, their age, range of interests, create an element of permanent presence and the feeling of a real life communication. As the Instagram tends to be an entertainment application, it erases formalities between a teacher and a student, which is a characteristic of classroom learning. While studying languages on the Instagram and texting messengers such addressings are supposed to be acceptable: «dear friends, my lovely followers» and etc. It helps to reduce the level of psychological tension in learning foreign languages. The video format of the application helps to create a favorable well-ordered psychological climate either, as a course of lectures is recorded in the informal atmosphere but not in the classroom. Many teachers exercise such a psychological method as «involving into their own reality» for establishing closer ties with the Instagram followers. They post not only educational material but also videos of their everyday life routine accompanied by the comments in the foreign language.

In this article the advantages of learning foreign languages using Instagram and texting messengers especially Whatsapp were reviewed. Nonetheless it is important to point out the obstacles, which the followers can face while studying languages with the help of such innovative methods. They can negatively affect the quality of the educational process. The absence of the quality control of the educational material, clear-cut criteria for designing tasks, violation of pedagogical principles and practice can entail low rates of learning and language retention. Moreover, the user cannot verify information relating teacher’s education, his or her diplomas or other documents confirming the professional competence. The main criteria of evaluating quality of teaching is his or her reputation which must be maintained replying to learners regularly without any hesitation in order not to lose them and attract new followers. Therefore, diplomas, certificates and skills development lose their relevance in the Instagram educational space and original approaches of teaching, its availability in all terms, constant involvement of students in the learning process and readiness of the teacher to be in touch in case of any questions from students become the key factors of teacher's success. Moreover, while using the Instagram for language learning the problem of time-management arises, both for students and teachers. Educating yourself with this tool requires the ability to prioritize, not to be prone to procrastination, which is tempting for this kind of platform. The participants are supposed to be perfect time-distributors and possess such personal qualities as self-discipline and high level of motivation.

Based on the conducted research it may be concluded that the Instagram, and Whatsapp applications are very popular, entertaining and quite useful sources of studying foreign languages of the present-day reality. Nevertheless they cannot be used as major sources of educational process due to specific nature of these applications.
4 CONCLUSIONS

These days the pace of life is increasing rapidly, consequently more and more applications appear in digital world. It gives extra room for further research and finding new ways of learning foreign languages. Nevertheless, the Instagram and Whatsapp are still developing, more functions are being introduced, new sophisticated methods appear, thus many more issues are subject to research.

REFERENCES


