

## **Language learning and the Internet**

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### **ABSTRACT**

New technologies have brought novelties in all classes in general and language classes in particular. The nowadays student is almost always ahead of the teacher as far as the use of new technologies is concerned and as a result the nowadays teacher has to struggle harder to respond to the students needs and make the right didactic use of technologies in class and get the greatest advantages out of it.

This paper will concentrate on the didactic use of the internet in the foreign language classroom. It will be discussed about the way the language classroom has changed and made use of the technology. As literature gives a great contribution to language acquisition, it will be shown how it can be taught through internet.

Even though the students are quite able to navigate on the web there is a great deal of information and instruction they can receive from the teacher, and on the other hand internet serves as an infinite source of teaching material by the side of the teacher.

It should be emphasised that the role of the teacher is very crucial in this process because the teacher with his/her experience and methodological and scientific preparation helps students not only to be better researchers of information but also use this information in the right way.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The nowadays student is almost always ahead of the teacher as far as the use of new technologies is concerned and as a result the nowadays teacher has to struggle harder to respond to the students needs and make the right didactic use of technologies in class and get the greatest advantages out of it.

According to our opinion the reason for this phenomenon is that language teaching and learning has differed a lot in the last decades. The new technologies have changed every aspect of our lives and they have brought an endless number of novelties in all classes in general and language classes in particular. Of course novelty is not welcomed

from all teachers but at some point change is inevitable and the introduction of new techniques and methodologies becomes necessary in order to answer the needs of time.

This paper will concentrate on the didactic use of the internet in the foreign language classroom. Even though the students are quite able to navigate on the web there is a great deal of information and instruction they can receive from the teacher, and on the other hand internet serves as an infinite source of teaching material by the side of the teacher.

## **THE NEW CLASSROOM**

As it was mentioned in the introduction the new classroom has changed significantly. The new technology has brought different classroom equipment.

Apart from the classical equipment (the board, pictures and word cards, flip charts, Cuisenaire rods, etc) found in every classroom some language classes, especially in private schools and language centres, afford and try a wide range of alternative equipment and technology available to them. Let us mention only some of them.

- The overhead projector which the teacher can use to project images and text using transparencies or connected to the computer. It allows us to project transparencies which can be either prepared in advance, written on in class, or a combination of the two.
- The interactive whiteboard which can be used to save and print anything the teacher or the students write during class because the board act like a large computer monitor.
- Audio and video. A lot of classroom technology (tape recorders, CD players, video and DVD players, MP3 players, language laboratories, TV, Radio, etc) is designed so that teachers and students can listen to audio and watch film and video.
- Non-book/paper dictionaries which come in three forms; on the internet, on CD-ROMs, or as separate pocket electronic dictionaries.<sup>26</sup>

## **COMPUTER-BASED TECHNOLOGIES AND PROGRAMS**

The big revolution in classroom technology has been in the development of computers and associated hardware and software. As the focus of this paper is on language teaching/learning, we will look at three areas in which computers are most commonly used; presentation, information getting and composing<sup>27</sup>.

### *Using computer-based technology for presentation*

- When hooked up to data projectors, computers can show a variety of presentation media including pictures, both still and animated. By using

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<sup>26</sup> J. Harmer, How to teach English, Pearson Education Limited, England 2007

<sup>27</sup> J. Harmer, How to teach English, Pearson Education Limited, England 2007 (p. 255)

programs such as Power Point, they can offer animated and highly attractive presentations using a combination of text, pictures and slide animations.

- When computers are hooked up to interactive whiteboards, not only can we project anything we want from the computer’s hard disk, but we can also save onto the hard disk anything that has been written or drawn on the board.
- Where students have wireless keyboards, for example, they can put their own work on the computer, and also access the internet, etc from where they sit – and it will appear on the main board.

*Using computer-based technology for information-getting*

- Whether we use the internet or specially designed CD-ROMs or DVDs, computers are fantastic reference tools. We can use several search to find information, and many dictionaries and encyclopaedias are now available.
- The internet is an endless source of activity and information. Whether students are researching a project on their own or following a webquest<sup>28</sup>, the information they can find on the web is extremely rich and varied, and dissolves the walls of the classroom. The possibilities are limitless.

*Using computer-based technology for composing*

- Word processing is still one of the most important uses for computers in the classroom. Pairs and groups of students can work at the same screen, constructing a piece of writing together. And their writing can be corrected using editing software.
- Teachers and students also use the internet and emailing for chatting (holding text-based conversations with other users, whether in the same school, or in different cities or countries).

When we encourage the students to use computers in class, we need to make sure that they do not waste their time in fruitless and undirected searching or use its great potential for other non-related activities.

## **THE USE OF INTERNET IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM**

The internet helps a great variety of students express themselves, foster all language skills, and acquire authentic language through a range of activities. It also helps the teacher create a great range of activities which cover grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation issues, communication skills, and promote creativity.

- The Internet in the one-computer classroom

With only one computer in a classroom, the options may be limited, but there are still a number of ways to use the Internet in the one-computer class. These activities can be performed both with an Internet connection in the classroom or at another location, since

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<sup>28</sup> In a webquest, students visit various websites (pre-determined by the teacher) in order to find information to use in a class project. (Harmer, 2007)

for many Internet-based activities, the connection can be made at a remote site, and resources brought to and from the classroom.

- Saving individual pages on disk

We can save individual pages simply by using the "save as" feature on our net browser. We have a choice of saving "text" or "source." Selecting "text," we save only the text of the page, with no colors or formatting. We can then open the document with a word processor.

If we select "source," we get all of the colors and formatting. This saves it as an HTML document, to be opened with a web browser such as Netscape Navigator or Internet Explorer. In this case, however, we must also save the graphics for that page. We do that by placing the mouse arrow over the graphic and pressing the mouse button. A dialogue box appears. We can select the option "Save this image as..." Show these documents on the computer monitor or a TV screen.

- Web collection utility

Downloading text and graphics of various pages can be tedious. An easier way is to use a web collection utility that collects, organizes, converts, and saves all the information we find on the web. While browsing the page we want to save, we simply click on the web saving utility, and it will automatically download the entire page and all of its associated graphics. In addition, we can specify how many levels we want it to download. That is, if we specify this page and one more level, it downloads the specified page and all the pages that are linked to it. Selecting two more levels downloads this page, all pages linked to it, and all pages linked to those pages. Once they are downloaded, the utility will convert or "translate" the pages to the format of the word processor of your choice, thus giving us a quality copy to print.

- The web in the computer lab

If we don't have one computer for each student, it usually works well to have two students for each computer. Three students for each computer is less desirable but can be satisfactory in some cases.

We don't need Internet connections in the lab, either. Web pages can be downloaded as described above and saved on each computer or, if the lab is networked, on the lab server. Downloading beforehand limits students' access to the Internet, that is, that they can access only the pages that you have downloaded for them. However, this may not be

practical for use with research activities, for which students might need freer access to Internet resources.<sup>29</sup>

## LITERATURE THROUGH INTERNET AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

A language is not just a set of words combined according to a specific grammatical set of rules. As a result, in order to acquire it, it is not enough to study lists of words and grammar rules. Studying the history and literature of the native country helps a lot to acquire the language. But how is this issue related to the topic discussed in this paper? The relation between these two is the contribution the internet gives to the teaching of literature for didactic purposes, the teaching of a language of course.

It is now very common for students to make different kinds of research of various levels and various forms. Well, the internet, this powerful resource, puts into disposal, and with a relative easiness, an endless amount of information.

The didactic use of the internet to teach literature can promote group dynamics based on the collaboration and the cooperation and brings to the centre of the class the learner and not the teacher as we are used to see in a literature class<sup>30</sup>.

The didactic use of the internet to teach literature puts a greater attention compared to the classical classroom, to the students individuality and consequently to the aspects related to the learning styles and acquisition strategies.

It offers a great possibility to increase the motivation of the students and as a result lower the affective filter<sup>31</sup>, and generate acquisition. And this will be achieved if the students will be able to perform; reading online, interpreting the applications of multimedia, initiate the research, find information, identify and evaluate the sources, come to know the related issues of copyright and privacy online, etc.

It may favour the improvement of students with a low level of self esteem, increasing their technical competences and promote the integration of those individuals who are penalized from a non harmonic development of their own system of representing the reality. The internet offers new learning mechanisms based mainly on the right side of the brain and with visual and kinaesthetic learning styles.

To finish with this subtopic, endless information is not necessary a positive thing if the teacher is not able to choose or to lead the student choose a good site. So that a site, dedicated to literature teaching for language acquisition purposes, may be used didactively, it should welcome the user and the material has to be offered in a user-friendly way. The level of attention, motivation and possibly pleasure has to remain high

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<sup>29</sup> <http://www.clta.net/lessons/class.html>

<sup>30</sup> P. E. Balboni, U. Margiotta, *Educazione Letteraria e Nuove Tecnologie*, UTET Diffusione Srl, Torino, 2008

<sup>31</sup> Krashen, S.D., *Second Language Acquisition and Second language Learning*, Pergamon, Oxford, 1981

as it leads to the discovery of information, new or old, but still the result of an intellectual research guided by the structure of the website.

## **THE WEBLOG; A BENEFIT TO LANGUAGE LEARNING FORM THE INTERNET**

An Internet-based weblog, also known as a blog, is essentially a homepage managed by a writer. McIntosh (2005) expands this definition in the following way:

*Historically, a weblog, or ‘blog’ for short, is recognized by its regularly updated, time and date stamped posts, running down the computer screen in chronologically reverse order (i.e. the most recent post comes first). Crucially, there is an ‘Add Comment’ feature so that readers of posts can leave their opinions, questions or thoughts. Finally, there is a writing style element: blogs are written by one individual who gives his or her thoughts in a generally relaxed, ‘spoken’ style (p. 2).*

A university English language class is a community of learners. However, any written work that a student produces on paper can only be shared with one person at a time or disseminated via photocopies. Thus, for even a relatively small class of 16 students, it is impractical for all students to make their writing available in hard copy form to all other members of the class. Due to such limitations, a student in the traditional writing class has typically presented his or her work to the teacher alone, or at most, to a group of peer reviewers and then to the teacher.

When a language teacher introduces blogging activities within the language classroom, the opportunities for student interaction and the horizons of that “learning space” are expanded exponentially, providing student writers with a far greater audience both within and outside the classroom.<sup>32</sup>

As it is obviously seen weblogs, this new technological tool, can arise significantly the motivation of students creating this way a safe learning environment. Considering the situation of the classrooms in our schools I would better propose the weblog and other online activities rather than other technological tools which are usually not available for classroom use. This is most of the time the excuse of teachers who are not willing to experiment new procedures and techniques but it is our duty to lead students toward up to date language learning methods and make them reach autonomy as soon as possible.

## **CONCLUSION**

As discussed throughout the paper the use of the internet carries in itself a lot of hard work and a lot of time and dedication by the side of the teacher but still they (teachers) should try to make this resourceful mean a continuous part of their teaching.

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<sup>32</sup> Blackstone B., Spiri J., Naganuma N. *Blogs in English language teaching and learning, Pedagogical uses and student responses.*

The internet is a very useful didactic procedure for the acquisition of foreign languages especially English as we can easily say English is the language of the internet. Teachers and students find an enormous amount of ideas, information, exercises, research material, reading material, etc.

Through various conversation exchange websites students can practice the language. The chat is filled with abbreviations, incorrect and oversimplified language. But still the communication is authentic and it leads to fluency and language acquisition rather than learning.

It was also mentioned in this paper that the internet is a rich resource of activities teachers can very easily make part of their teaching material. Through internet the teacher can help and lead the student toward autonomous learning which is the final purpose of language teaching and learning.

It was spoken about the rich contribution of literature to foreign language learning and how the internet with carefully selected websites, and with the right instructions from the part of the teacher, can be used as a very useful resource.

But we should emphasise that the role of the teacher is very crucial in this process because the teacher with his/her experience and methodological and scientific preparation helps students not only to be better researchers of information but also use this information in the right way.

We are leaving in an era of change and all the electronic and informatics alphabets will be more and more sophisticated, but the role of the teacher will be very specific because the mission of education is to promote the citizen with the best characteristics and for this reason the role of the teacher is irreplaceable.

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