THE ROLE OF MULTIMEDIA TOOLS IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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Abstract

In the article the authors define the importance of research about the impact of multimedia and CALL on language acquisition within limited curriculum hours, possibility to combine self-study with classroom training, to provide systematic feedback, regular progress checking, dynamic language improvement.

Key words: multimedia, CALL, ESP, foreign language.

РОЛЬ МУЛЬТИМЕДИЙНЫХ ТЕХНОЛОГИЙ ПРИ ОБУЧЕНИИ ИНОСТРАННОМУ ЯЗЫКУ

Аннотация

В статье авторы исследует влияние компьютеризации на качество и динамику языковой подготовки, возможность оптимального сочетания самостоятельной и аудиторной работы, наличие обратной связи, контроля за роста языковых знаний.

Ключевые слова: мультимедия, компьютеризация обучения, английский как язык профессионального общения.

1. Article

Teaching foreign languages at higher educational establishments 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. It was proved by a language teaching theoreticians that learning a second language is both intensive and time-consuming activity.

"The Foreign Service Institute estimates that…from 600 to 1320 hours of fulltime instruction are needed to reach a level of high fluency, depending on the language" [1]. To attain the goals set by unified state educational program it is necessary to perfect language teaching techniques, organize effectively extracurriculum work of language learners, rationalize teaching, use interactive multimedia and integrate them into overall teaching process.

The advantages of modern multimedia teaching 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 reliable assessment 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, communication comfort, gaining self-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". According to Reeves and Nass [2], interaction with computers is "fundamentally social and natural". Simple controls provide easynavigation 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 time and efforts to language studies students progress at maximum. Unlike conversation classes where students are put on the spot by the teacher while performing some task, communicating with computer gives feeling of safety and anonymity and opportunity to be still rewarded if the task is performed correctly [3].

Multimedia programs 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 with the help of the visual feedback. The next step is mastering main positional variants of English sounds (allophones) in sample and minimal pairs. Practicing English sounds in different contexts completes sounds pronunciation training. Learner has an opportunity to set options from relaxed to strict speech recognition. Even adult learners overcome the psychological barrier of speaking in public after such training. 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. 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.

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: [1] formal marks of grammatical form; [2] formal distributional characteristics that make it possible to identify and single out the grammatical target form within the sentence; [3] 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 by students of technical specialties. There are three main subsequent steps: [1] introduction, comprehension of certain grammatical forms through structural models; [2] consolidation and reproduction of grammatical target forms in new sentences similar to the previously learnt ones; [3] 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 shifting the focus of learners' attention from language form to language use and encourage their participation in real communicative situations. Alongside with mastering working

vocabulary and grammar much of their time students are learning how to use what they already know. The stress from language-centered approach is shifted to skills-centered approach, i.e. the emphasis is not on whether students remember all the words, 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.

Interactive computer-assisted language learning (CALL)based on multimedia networked computer offers realistic practice, realistic situations and real-life interactions and seeks to integrate various language skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing [4]. Successful CALL programs offer realistic situations and real-life interactions. Voice input (rather than keyboard or mouse input) has enhanced active learning. 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 prompt response to linguistic and extralinguistic 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.

Training in writing envisages spelling, punctuation acquisition, use of grammatical constructions, performing exercises in a written form. 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. Sending e-mails to their pen-pals, writing reviews of websites, comments on articles, etc. integrates students into authentic social contexts [5].

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.

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. 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 tasks, concerning real-life situations presented on satellite TV and videos. 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. The content and character of video material determine a set of tasks to be solved. 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.

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