

Using ICT in language training for future teachers in linguistically mixed areas

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Abstract

At the Faculty of Central European Studies of Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra the lectures and seminars for future teachers have been delivered in Hungarian, Slovak or both languages for more than 50 years. 90% of our students come from linguistically mixed areas therefore this system of education suits their needs. Even if this method has proved good, recently it has also proved to be insufficient. Due to globalising processes, the English language is being introduced to education even in junior sections of primary schools continuing up to the end of the secondary education. Therefore, it is necessary for future teachers (who have not experienced this remodelling of the system of education) to be sufficiently prepared for the new conditions and besides two languages used in linguistically mixed areas they should have a command of at least one foreign (worldwide spoken) language.

As the range of our study programmes and the number of lessons are limited, it is essential to introduce new forms and methods to education as well as utilize possibilities of modern ICT. The paper deals with the possibilities of using mobile devices in education. Authors focus also on utilizing e-learning and m-learning in teaching English language, to help teachers in their future practise.

Keywords: linguistically mixed areas, language, teacher, ICT, learning

Introduction

One of the priority requirements for an individual to succeed in today's society is the knowledge of foreign languages, which became even more important when Slovakia joined the European Union, since multilingualism is considered a significant qualification in Europe. Ideally, the European citizens should have a command of at least three languages: firstly, a language functioning as lingua franca all over Europe, secondly, the official language of

their country and thirdly, the language of their own region that is mostly their mother tongue.

The schools and educational institutions in Europe, including those in Slovakia, are facing a new challenge: they have to make possible the multilingual education that is developing and supporting multilingualism. By its own policy, the European Union called upon its member states to achieve that each and every citizen of the European Union be able to speak at least two languages apart from their mother tongue. Language skills and competence bridge the still existing territorial borders and they help get over the cultural boundaries. Schools might considerably contribute to the promotion of multilingualism by appropriate language teaching and using more languages in education.

Multilingualism and language teaching

According to the most recent census (2011), almost 20% of the approximately 5.4 million inhabitants stated a different ethnicity from Slovak, which indicates the multi-ethnic character of the country. The Slovak Government officially recognizes 12 national minority communities. The Hungarians are the most significant and officially the largest ethnic minority with about 460 000 people constituting 8.5% of the entire population of Slovakia. (Other ethnic groups include Roma 2.0%, Czechs 0.6%, Ruthenians 0.6%, Ukrainians 0.1%, other 0.5%. Unofficial estimates place the Roma population between 6% and 10 %.) The legal regulations of Slovakia, namely the law on minority language use, in effect since 1 September 1999, makes it possible for members of minorities to use their mother tongue in spoken and written discourse in municipalities where the proportion of the given minority is at least 20% of the total population. (The European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages concerns the following languages in Slovakia: Hungarian, Ruthenian and Ukrainian Czech, German, Polish, Romani, Croatian and Bulgarian.) (Szabó Mihály, 2006)¹

Multilingualism has a positive impact on the intellectual development of the individual as well as it enriches their mental development that has been proved by many scientific researches in Slovakia and abroad.

With students who come from linguistically mixed areas, teaching (especially language teaching) has an even more specific character. Many students from secondary schools with Hungarian as the language of instruction come to the university with weak command of Slovak. On the other hand, students coming from Slovak secondary schools might speak some Hungarian, but their language competency level is usually very low, their style colloquial at best.

In these cases, one of the primary objectives of teaching mainly is to attain a similar level of command in both (Hungarian and Slovak) languages at students, thus preceding possible problems in any of these languages in the

¹ <http://www.ciemer.org/mercator/pdf/wp23eng.pdf>

course of their further studies and future professional life. For this reason, the students of pre-school and elementary education have lectures in Slovak and Hungarian grammar and literature that besides developing their language skills, enhances their knowledge in the given fields. This is especially significant since teaching both languages will be an organic part of their future profession.

The methodology of language teaching is so complex that it is impossible to point at a single method claiming it universal, theoretically consequent, and generally so authentic that it could be used in all contexts irrespectively of the general aims². There is a big difference in teaching/learning a mother tongue or a foreign language.

Language teaching is possible in an indirect way for example during lecturing some other subjects in a way that the lecturer according to their mutual agreement with the students chooses the language of the lecture, for example, they decide to use Slovak, but all the important terminology will be said also in Hungarian. This suits both types of students (weak Slovak, colloquial Hungarian), since those, who do not speak standard or professional Hungarian can learn new phrases, and those whose Slovak language competence is weaker will be in a „constant” Slovak environment thus forced to use the Slovak language. The more important phrases also used in Hungarian will help better understand the Slovak text as well as the study material.

Teaching English language in linguistically mixed areas is very fascinating because the principle of indirect teaching during lecturing some other subjects might be applied here as well. I use this method very frequently in my lessons of Basis of informatics and other courses relating to computer technology. Terminology and basic concepts in this field have been formed in English language and some of them have directly naturalized in other languages for example, monitor, mobile, scanner, program, display, etc.

Students might find the English abbreviations such as TCP/IP, WWW, RAM, ROM, BIOS, GIS, etc. also very useful. The interpretation of these abbreviations always starts with the English phrase and the explanation highlights its Hungarian or Slovak equivalent for example ROM - Read Only Memory - Csak olvasható memória - Pamät' len na čítanie. During other (not language) subjects, this comes so natural to students, they even do not realize that meanwhile they are learning English, Slovak or Hungarian languages.

Using and reading literature in more languages can be a good precondition to success. Students have to be properly motivated if we want to get them to deal with English, Hungarian and Slovak literature. They make good use of parallel information obtaining from various sources for comparative studies that help build up their own knowledge system not only by simple information reception but also by the means of critical evaluation and selection.

² <http://www.ofi.hu/tudastar/elo-nyelvek-iskolai> (2011. 6. 4.)

Concerned teachers always look for the possibilities to improve their students' language skills and to acquire the study material at the same time. They use various methods for example, as part of their preparation for the lessons, students have to collect those phrases from various language sources that they do not know in the other language. Following that, they might create bi-/trilingual (translation) dictionaries or explanatory dictionaries from the collected words through which they can learn the language as well as their future profession. At the same time, we ensured the students' active participation in the education process, non-violent development of their language culture and enhancement of their language competences. (Pšenáková, 2005)

„But learning new words is not enough to translate a sentence properly. The key is to know the meaning(s) of a word, how to use it and where to use it.“ (Dzurjov-Genči-Garabík, 2011)³ This fact is obvious for us too, therefore English language is also taught in a traditional way at our Faculty where depending on their study programmes, our students have 90 or 180 minute-contact lessons (English language seminars) weekly.

As the range of our study programmes and the number of lessons are limited, it is essential to introduce new forms and methods to education as well as utilize possibilities of modern ICT.

ICT in education

The devices of information and communication technologies might be incorporated in education as means of communication, information, education, learning and developmental pedagogy. For example, the computer might fill a part of the teacher as well as of the student. As the teacher, it can demonstrate (teach) the curriculum, it can ask controlling questions (test), drill, play simulations, document progress, make statistics, and function as a source of information.

Although the traditional education methods and approaches are becoming insufficient, they cannot be completely excluded from the education and training; if they are adequately complemented by modern ICT tools, teaching will become much more interesting and efficient, and will motivate students to achieve better performance.

Utilizing computers in pedagogical processes not only for teaching informatics itself but also for supporting other subjects whose contents are not related to computer studies/technology and informatics (for example biology, chemistry, fine art, teaching various languages) is far from being a new idea, more likely the opposite is true. Teachers can hardly imagine their work without a computer or other ICT devices such as a projector, printer, video, DVD player, interactive whiteboard etc.

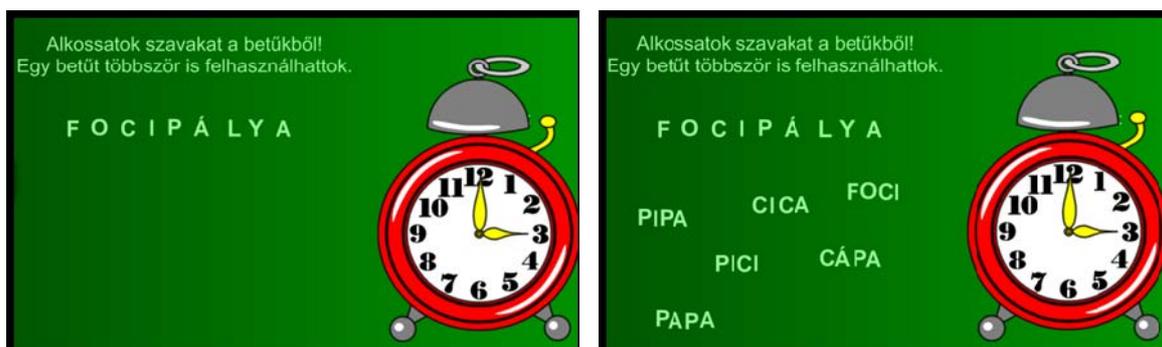
³ http://korpus.juls.savba.sk/~slovko/2011/Proceedings_Slovko_2011.pdf

Whiteboard in language teaching

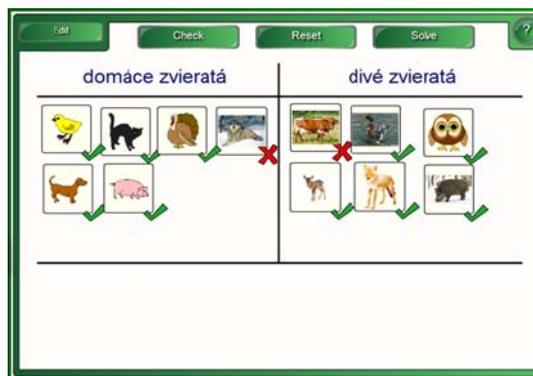
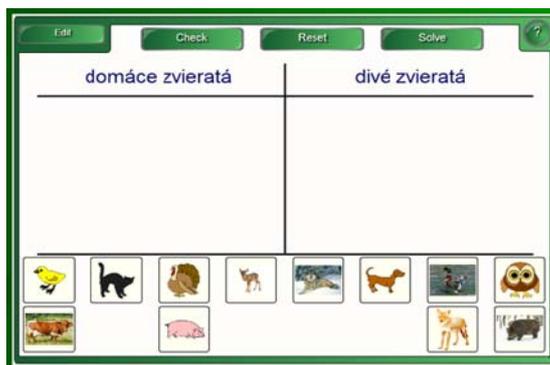
Lately in Slovakia, mainly the interactive whiteboard has become a „hit” at schools. Due to a national project, schools all over Slovakia have been equipped with them and teachers began to use these devices in droves. Unfortunately, many of the teachers use this tool just as a projection screen monitoring the board through their PC, while their students passively watch the projected content. In these cases, we cannot speak about interactivity and the board loses its true value. If the teacher can utilise this tool properly, it will become a very useful teaching aid.

How can the interactive whiteboard be utilized in teaching languages? As we train future teachers, we also deal with the opportunities of proper usage of the interactive whiteboard in teaching various school subjects, therefore in teaching languages among others. Through the following very simple practical examples, we can introduce the possibilities of the interactive study material in language teaching at junior division of primary schools.

When teaching Hungarian language, students have to rearrange the letters of a given word so that they create various new Hungarian words:



The next task has been designed for Slovak language lessons and serves for the vocabulary enrichment of the students. The kids have to put the pictures of some animals in the correct place according to their origin while making Slovak sentences using the names of the animals in the pictures, for example: A pig is a domestic animal (Prasiatko je domáce zviera); A fox is a wild animal (Líška je divé zviera).

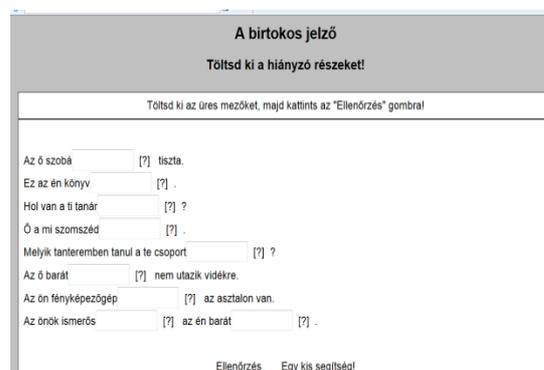


Using the interactive whiteboard might be a useful aid in attaining better results not only in language teaching, as the appearing information can affect many of our sensory organs (for example various audio recordings), the visual input is not static thus it can get and keep students' attention by its movement, and activate students' abilities.

However, the board might be used in upper classes and not only for acquisition but also for examination of the level of understanding. The following tasks were created in the Hot Potatoes⁴ software and were designed to teach Hungarian grammar for the senior division of primary schools. (Pšenáková-Kelemen, 2011) These types of tasks could be easily transplanted into any other language teaching.

First example: Complete the sentences with the correct possessive suffixes!

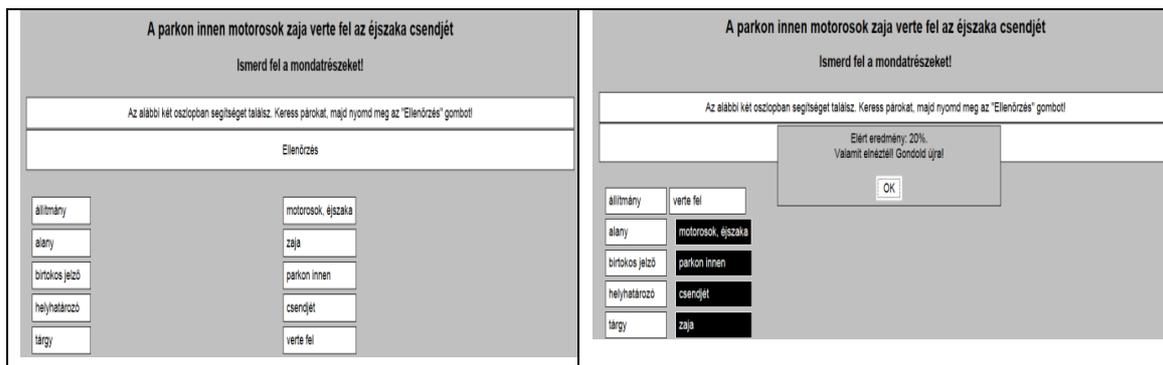
The task is easy; the students have to complete the gaps with the possessive suffixes in the given sentences. The programme accepts the good answers. If the answer is not correct, it helps the student find the solution. The help text will be determined by the author of the task, usually the teacher.



Second example: Identify the parts of the sentence!

Students are given a sentence that appears in the headline. Their task is to find and identify the sentence parts by matching the words or phrases from the above sentence with the syntactic terms (subject, predicate, object etc.) underneath. They move certain words on the board by the „drag and drop” function. This activity not only motivates them, but it helps the acquisition and fixation of the study material.

⁴ <http://hotpot.uvic.ca/>



In addition to the demonstrated ICT tools having been used in education for a longer time, we tried to introduce newer and more up-to-date methods and forms, one of them being m-learning.

M-learning

Mobile communication devices have become the tools we can hardly miss in our everyday life. The term mobile learning (m-learning) refers to the use of mobile devices in teaching and learning. From a pedagogical perspective, mobile learning supports a new dimension in the educational process.

Mobile learning (m-learning) makes studying possible anytime, anywhere, about anything and without time restrictions through mobile phone. M-learning is not a new learning possibility exclusively for students. It can be used by anybody who wants to learn. Students can use this learning method individually or in group work. Finally yet importantly, it may be a great experience to learn new things while using our mobile. The greatest advantage of m-learning is that the study material is presented in short and understandable instalments and simple form. (Pšenáková, 2010)

The use of m-learning is possible on contact lessons as well as for distance learning. In both cases, the students receive the learning materials through mobile devices. During the preparation of the learning materials, it is not necessary to differentiate the content. However, the learning material must be prepared differently than other digital learning materials. Most of those teachers, who had already developed e-learning modules, had problems with preparing the short modules for m-learning in the beginning. These prepared modules must create a homogeneous and compact corpus. (Pšenáková, 2010)

M-learning in language learning

Mobile phones can support learning more kinds of subjects but language learning is one of those fields of education where mobile technologies offer numerous practical uses. Its usage is simple, effective and can be just as

easily utilized inside of the classroom as outside of it. (Valarmathi, 2011)⁵. For example while waiting for the bus, train, or plane when we have a short free time, we can learn new words, revise the tasks, read some texts apart from just playing mobile games. We can get exercises in the form of short messages every day. Pictures, audio or video sequences might support the language learning. These are usually necessary for foreign language learning. The learning process may be even more interesting for students using m-learning if the task is incorporated into a story.

M-learning can be successful in language teaching and learning for many reasons. On one hand because of the small size of the display, the assignments must be short and comprehensible; however, they must remain interesting. Using pictures in short language lessons is essential since they make language acquisition easier and learning becomes more interesting. When learning a foreign language, practising the pronunciation is necessary. The voice function in mobile devices might be well utilized for this purpose. What is more, we can make our syllabus more colourful with using video instalments. (Pšenáková-Hegedús, 2010)

Let us present how easy and fun can be an assignment through our mobile. The title of the m-learning module is „Interrogative sentences using the words WHERE, WHEN and HOW OFTEN”. The gray cat Leo accompanies students through the learning material. Sometimes Leo needs help in theory and practice asking the students some questions. Explaining and practising certain grammar problems and issues (in this case the interrogative sentences), the students themselves practice and learn the formulation of English questions. Furthermore, they have to solve the test by themselves. In the end, Leo thanks for help and says good-bye. The following pictures are illustration from the whole list of displays.





Conclusion

Multilingual education would produce an extra work for both students and teachers mainly if they wanted to use ICT tools on their lessons. Lessons of this type require teachers with high level of persistence, patience, tolerance, and self-control, and some knowledge of peculiar methods is presumed as well. Students also have to possess strong willpower, although they frequently need to be encouraged by their teachers. They have to overcome their fears and start using a language they do not speak well, because perfect acquisition of a language is very difficult or even impossible without an active language use.

The participants of the training must accept those rules that apply to all language learning: one can learn to speak through speaking, to understand through listening and to write through writing.

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Ildikó Pšenáková (Ing., PhD.) was born in 1957. In 1982 she graduated (MSc.) with distinction at the Department of Computer Science and Engineering of the Faculty of Computing Technologies and Informatics at Saint Petersburg Electrotechnical University. She defended her PhD. degree of Technology of Education in 2001 on the Pedagogical Faculty of Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. Since 1982 to 1992 she was working as an associated professor at the Department of Computers and Informatics at Technical University in Košice. From 1995 she works at Constantine the Philosopher University. Her research interests include the usage of websites in education and the preparation of E-Learning/M-Learning materials.



Orsolya Hegedűs (MA.) was born in 1974. She graduated at the Faculty of Arts at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. Since 2007, she has been an Assistant Lecturer at the Faculty of Central European Studies teaching English. She is also a PhD student at the faculty. Her main research interests are English language teaching and fantasy literature.

Abstrakt - Slovak

Využitie IKT vo vyučovaní jazykov pre budúcich učiteľov na jazykovo zmiešanom území

Na Fakulte stredoeurópskych štúdií Univerzity Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre (Slovensko) sa predmety pre budúcich učiteľov vyučujú maďarsky, slovensky alebo dvojjazyčne už vyše 50 rokov. Študenti, ktorí prichádzajú k nám študovať, pochádzajú skoro z 90% z jazykovo zmiešaného územia, preto im takýto spôsob vyučovania vyhovuje. Aj keď sa tento spôsob osvedčil, v poslednom čase sa ukázalo, že je nedostatočný. Vďaka globalizačným procesom vo svete sa zavádza do vyučovania anglický jazyk už aj na prvom stupni základných škôl a pokračuje až do ukončenia strednej školy. Je preto nevyhnutné, aby budúci učitelia (ktorí ešte túto predstavu školstva nezažili) boli dostatočne pripravení na nové podmienky, a okrem

dvoch jazykov používaných na jazykovo zmiešanom území ovládali aspoň jeden svetový jazyk.

Nakoľko sme obmedzení rozsahom študijných programov a počtom vyučovacích hodín je nevyhnutné zavádzať do vyučovania nové formy a metódy, a využiť možnosti moderných IKT. Predkladaný článok sa zaoberá možnosťami využitia mobilných technológií vo vyučovacom procese, resp. ako je možné využiť e-learning a m-learning vo vyučovaní anglického jazyka pre budúcich učiteľov.

Absztrakt - Hungarian

Az IKT lehetőségeinek felhasználása a leendő tanárok nyelvi képzésében a nyelvileg vegyes területeken

A Nyitrai Konstantin Filozófus Egyetem Közép-európai Tanulmányok Karán (Szlovákia) a tanárjelöltek számára az előadások és szemináriumok már több mint 50 éve magyar, szlovák vagy mindkét nyelven zajlanak. Diákjaink 90%-a nyelvileg vegyes területekről származik, így ez az oktatási környezet megfelel igényeiknek. Bár ez a módszer bevált, az utóbbi időben mégis kevésnek bizonyult. A globalizációnak köszönhetően már az általános iskolák alsó tagozatán is bevezették az angol nyelv oktatását, amely a középfokú oktatás végével zárul. Ezért szükséges, hogy a leendő tanárok (akikre még nem volt érvényes ez az oktatási rendszer) kellően felkészüljenek az új feltételekre. Tehát a nyelvileg vegyes területeken használt nyelvek mellett legalább egy idegen nyelvet (ill. világnyelvet) is beszéljenek.

Mivel az általunk kínált szakok és órák száma korlátozott, fontos, hogy kihasználjuk a modern IKT lehetőségeit, és ezek segítségével új formákat és módszereket vezessünk be az oktatásba. A szerzők az e-learning és m-learning lehetőségeit mutatják be az angol nyelv oktatásában, ill. a tanulmány a mobil eszközök oktatásban történő felhasználásával is foglalkozik.