

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN EU- FOCUSED FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract

This article provides the experience and advice on the use of various information and communication technologies for teaching foreign languages (such as English, German and French and others) in the EU-focused context. This idea arose due to the fact that the countries of the European languages which students study are not just states with a rich historical and cultural past, but they are also members of the European Union. Even with the UK leaving the EU, the topic has not lost its relevance, since for many years this country has been part of the EU, and Brexit has been one of the main discussed topics for three years and is revealing the current situation in the country. Besides other English speaking countries like Scotland remain parts of the European Union.

In this connection, it is necessary to update approaches in teaching EU-languages firstly in the content, including more information about the current state of the target - language countries, and secondly in active use the possibilities of new computer technologies.

The article presents tools for improving various types of language skills: resources for practicing vocabulary, listening, speaking and reading skills. The ICT-technologies can encourage language study and motivate students to analyze and express their points of view. This paper is also proposing various tasks options that can be given to students for deepening their knowledge of the European Union. This can help to present relevant information about a state and socio-economic structure of the EU countries, the main directions of culture and education, science, innovation and different spheres of social life.

Keywords: technology, tools, the European Union, target - language countries, foreign language teaching

1 INTRODUCTION

New social and historical realities are appearing in the modern world every day. It is caused by the acceleration of the society development, as well as by the objective process of the world globalization. All these changes must be taken into account in the teaching of foreign languages. So, today the target-language countries are not just the states with a rich historical and cultural past, but members of the European Union, in which nations speaking different languages have been closely connected not only with socio-economic, political, but also with multilateral cultural contacts already for several decades.

In this connection, it is necessary to develop approaches in teaching European foreign languages, in particular enriching it with the current cultural context.

Information and communication technologies are good for this purpose, since they can be used to make the learning process fascinating and efficient. This article provides experience and advice on the use of various ICT services for teaching European languages in EU-focused context.

2 TOOLS FOR EU-FOCUSED FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Nowadays, there is a wide range of teaching resources, tools and apps provided on the Internet in the arsenal of a foreign language teacher. They can be actively used to improve various skills and teach different types of language activities - speaking, listening, reading and writing.

2.1 Tool for learning vocabulary Quizlet

It can serve to practice the vocabulary on the subject of the European Union, and also any other topic. The platform for learning and practicing vocabulary Quizlet (<https://quizlet.com>) gives an opportunity to create your own list of words quickly, filling it with the necessary educational material, for which all types of tasks provided on the platform will be available then. For example, on the topic "The European Union", you can add a list of vocabulary such as "Euro, diversity, unity, council, commission, parliament, member, border, visa, Shengen, justice, trade, supranational, sovereignty".

In this online training system, a ready-made list of words is entered or taken (for example, the names of EU member countries), and they are worked out by using a series of exercises that automatically become available after entering or selecting a ready-made vocabulary list after pressing the button "Create a set" without additional effort from the teacher. If it is necessary, you can provide words with photos and pictures for better memorization.

There are the following possible modes of control and practicing vocabulary:

1. "Flashcards" - working out the words in a list or on virtual cards. While turning over, they show the translation of a word. At the same time, listening to lexemes is available, and cards can be printed out in various convenient formats for the teacher. The cards with the difficult words can be marked with an asterisk in order to remember or revise later.
2. "Scatter" is a lotto game in which you need to combine words on a virtual lotto field with their translation. If you combine the words correctly, they disappear from the screen.
3. "Learn" - training of written reproduction of the word translation, that we name "Race". The word floats up and moves on the screen, and while it is happening, you need to type its translation in the opened free window.
4. "Speller" – the voice record of the word with the next presentation of statistics on how well the lexemes are memorized.
5. "Test" is a task that includes several different types of control ('Write' - write a word translation; 'Matching' - match a word and its translation; 'Multiple choice' - choose the correct word translation from several suggested ones; 'True \ False' - answer whether the statement is true). At the end of the test, the statistics are displayed on the screen indicating the words the student has learned well, and in which ones there are a lot of mistakes, and it is recommended to revise them again.
6. "Gravity" - the game as an entertaining-training element: "asteroids-words" fall from the top of the screen, the students have to type their translation before they fall on the planet and explode.

There are ready-made assignments for learning foreign language vocabulary for learners on the platform. In addition, the teacher can create a closed course in Quizlet and invite students to monitor their progress, identifying the most frequent mistakes the teacher should pay attention to.

2.2 Wordcloud tools

This resource (eng. Wordcloud, wordle) is a picture, a visual representation of a list of categories or keywords. The teacher needs to make a list of words that he wants to present as an attractive image, and just copy it to a special service to create a wordcloud.

The advantages of this tool are unusual representation of information, simplicity and availability, opportunity to choose the words you need. A visual representation of the vocabulary helps students activate associative memorization.

Work techniques can be very different. The wordcloud can be a support for the introduction to the topic: we

can ask to guess what will be discussed in the lesson or comment on what associations with the words the students have. It is possible to include in the wordle the lexemes that must be pre-taught before reading a new text or listening to the audio.

Wordcloud can also be an incentive for making a coherent statement. You can enter a familiar poem (lyrics, dialogue) into the program and offer students to recreate it.

This tool is also suitable for practicing vocabulary - you can mix words from several subject groups (for example, on the topic "EU" - vocabulary from the political and cultural sphere and ask students to sort them out).

Wordle acts as a reference list of tokens so that students can write sentences on a specific topic or they compete in groups trying to make a sentence using as many words from the cloud as possible.

Even grammatical phenomena can be trained using this visualization. For example, the wordle introduces three forms of the most commonly used verbs on the topic, in which they appear intermingled. The task for the students is to find and group each verb with its past tense forms.

There is a potential for practicing word formation - by taking lexemes-nouns, you can ask to convert them into adjectives and vice versa (politics – political, economics - economic, unity-united, etc.)

Online services for creating such images are numerous, they can be found by typing in the wordcloud search engine. There are many free and non-registration options, but there are options you need to register, that have more complex visual presentation, the choice of shape, and so on. When creating Wordcloud, you should take into account that the image size of a certain word will be larger if you type it several times when making up a list of words to create a wordle. So, if the central theme is the European Union, you need to type this phrase many times.

2.3 Cloze tests tools

To create an exercise which is a test with gaps quickly, you do not need to waste time and remove the words manually. To do this, you can use special online tools. Taking any text on the necessary topic, for example, the basic text of the European Union, the teacher can create a test with gaps out of it, setting up any intervals - you can remove every third or fifth word, or remove only words of a certain part of speech (nouns, verbs, prepositions).

2.4 Voki educational tool

Voki is an educational tool for practicing listening skills and pronunciation. Selecting a character which the site offers, or completely creating it according wish (choosing hair color, clothes, etc.), you let this character speak any text, choosing a pronunciation variant (British or American English). As an example we took the text about Brexit, and the character voiced it, and the students had to answer questions to this audiotext.

You can train listening strategies with the help of Voki. Using this tool the students practise pronunciation and phonetic skills. There is also an option to record any text yourself and develop communication skills, using a microphone. The character in this version will voice the text made up by the student himself, for example, answer the question who Europeans are or talk about one of the EU countries.

The resource allows you to read poems, present situations on behalf of various heroes, talk about yourself and different aspects of your life, speak out on a certain topic, problem.

2.5 Practicing listening skills with songs

The students introduce the modern musical culture of the EU countries and practise listening skills with the platform <https://lyricstraining.com>. The website contains video clips in various European languages. After completing the free registration, the students choose the level of knowledge and listen to the song, filling in the blanks and inserting the words they heard. Depending on the chosen language level, the app will randomly skip 10% of words for beginners, 25% - for intermediate, and 50% - for advanced students.

This app increases the interest in learning the language and has an entertainment character.

2.6 Mindmaps

Mental maps (mind maps) are a visual way of presenting information that reflects the connections between concepts.

In the center of such scheme is the keyword and basic concepts, and branching sub-items in different

directions. The result is a detailed diagram representing a specific problem. You can draw a map on a computer using special programs, many of which can be found on the Internet.

On topics related to the European Union, mental maps can represent its structure in the whole or they can be devoted to one of the EU countries.

2.7 MOODLE

Moodle is a free and open-source learning management system for internet-based courses (Baklanova, Vivogradov, 2014, p.182). Our EU-course was supported for blended learning with help of this platform (Romanova, 2018, p.107). There is a tool-set with tests, e-lectures, tasks, quizzes, surveys, polls, audio and video. This LMS provides opportunities to improve student learning with media, interactive resources, providing feedback and a variety of interaction and collaboration tools, such as wikis, forums and chats.

3 CONCLUSION

Thus, we recommend the use of information and communication technologies in the EU-focused European languages teaching. They will help to present materials on contemporary Europe in an entertaining way, allow students to grasp the rich cultures, languages, people, and politics of today's Europe and Europeans.

ICT contribute to the effectiveness of learning a foreign language, in reception (listening and reading), production (speaking and writing), practising vocabulary or grammatical phenomena. The advantages of ICT-implementation into teaching practice are increasing students' motivation and closing a gap of understanding contemporary national context of the target-language countries.

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