

Lecture № 11

Producing electronic materials

Plan

1. Electronic materials in FLT
2. Creating electronic materials online.
3. Using authoring tools to produce materials.
4. Computer based language learning programmes.

What are electronic materials? When we refer to electronic materials creation and use in the context of this chapter, we are talking about informational resources, exercises and activities that you create our self and which your students use on a computer as web page or CD-ROM content, or even in printed form. The production of these materials may include working with external web pages, using web page design skills, the use of small programs installed on your own computer or more complex CD-ROM production software. The choice of tool will be determined not only by the kinds of materials you want to produce, but also by the time available to you and the resources at your disposal. It is beyond the scope of this book to go into the more complex sides of materials production, so here we will mostly be concentrating on simple web-based materials or materials prepared using web resources.

There are many reasons why you might want to create and use your own electronic materials in class. Firstly, you will be able to provide extra practice for weaker learners, and consolidation and review exercises or groups. Secondly as you build up a collection of your own resources with your own learners' needs in mind, you will start to generate large bank of materials which can be used in class or for self-study at any point in the future. In class these kinds of materials can provide a change of pace and can be highly motivating. Learners often enjoy the chance of competing against the computer with these kinds of discrete answer exercise types. If time is spent on feedback, you can check which language areas learners have had problems with and provide further practice materials if necessary. One of the easiest ways of getting started in this area is to use some of the simple exercise generators which can be found online. These produce a variety of exercises from printable resources to be taken into class to exercises which can be turned into web pages and made available on the Internet, both for your learners and for other teachers if you decide you want to share them. One of the most popular is the Discovery School Puzzlemaker (<http://puzzlemaker.school.discovery.com/>) This features a variety of different exercise types, including traditional ones such as word searches.

What is an authoring tool? An authoring tool is an installable program that allows you to create materials in electronic format which can then be distributed on a CD-ROM, DVD, USB pen drive, floppy disc or via a web page to your learners. Authoring programs are used to make CD-ROM-based reference tools like Microsoft

Encarta (see Chapter 8), but also more simple resources like information leaflets, brochures, handouts and interactive exercises.

Multimedia. Language teachers have been avid users of technology for a very long time. Gramophone records were among the first technological aids to be used by language teachers in order to present students with recordings of native speakers' voices, and broadcasts from foreign radio stations were used to make recordings on reel-to-reel tape recorders. Other examples of technological aids that have been used in the foreign language classroom include slide projectors, film-strip projectors, film projectors, videocassette recorders and DVD players. In the early 1960s, integrated courses (which were often described as multimedia courses) began to appear. Examples of such courses are *Ecouter et Parler* (consisting of a coursebook and tape recordings) and *Deutsch durch die audiovisuelle Methode* (consisting of an illustrated coursebook, tape recordings and a film-strip - based on the Structuro-Global Audio-Visual method).

During the 1970s and 1980s standard microcomputers were incapable of producing sound and they had poor graphics capability. This represented a step backwards for language teachers, who by this time had become accustomed to using a range of different media in the foreign language classroom. The arrival of the multimedia computer in the early 1990s was therefore a major breakthrough as it enabled text, images, sound and video to be combined in one device and the integration of the four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing (Davies 2011: Section 1).

Examples of CALL programs for multimedia computers that were published for multimedia computers on CD-ROM and DVD from the mid-1990s onwards are described by Davies (2010: Section 3). CALL programs are still being published on CD-ROM and DVD, but Web-based multimedia CALL has now virtually supplanted these media. Following the arrival of multimedia CALL, multimedia language centers began to appear in educational institutions. While multimedia facilities offer many opportunities for language learning with the integration of text, images, sound and video, these opportunities have often not been fully utilised. One of the main promises of CALL is the ability to individualise learning but, as with the language labs that were introduced into educational institutions in the 1960s and 1970s, the use of the facilities of multimedia centres has often devolved into rows of students all doing the same drills (Davies 2010: Section 3.1). There is therefore a danger that multimedia centres may go the same way as the language labs. Following a boom period in the 1970s, language labs went rapidly into decline. Davies (1997: p. 28) lays the blame mainly on the failure to train teachers to use language labs, both in terms of operation and in terms of developing new methodologies, but there were other factors such as poor reliability, lack of materials and a lack of good ideas.

Managing a multimedia language centre requires not only staff who have a knowledge of foreign languages and language teaching methodology but also staff with technical know-how and budget management ability, as well as the ability to combine all these into creative ways of taking advantage of what the technology can offer. A

centre manager usually needs assistants for technical support, for managing resources and even the tutoring of students. Multimedia centres lend themselves to self-study and potentially self-directed learning, but this is often misunderstood. The simple existence of a multimedia centre does not automatically lead to students learning independently. Significant investment of time is essential for materials development and creating an atmosphere conducive to self-study. Unfortunately, administrators often have the mistaken belief that buying hardware by itself will meet the needs of the centre, allocating 90% of its budget to hardware and virtually ignoring software and staff training needs (Davies et al. 2011: *Foreword*).

Self-access language learning centres or independent learning centres have emerged partially independently and partially in response to these issues. In self-access learning, the focus is on developing learner autonomy through varying degrees of self-directed learning, as opposed to (or as a complement to) classroom learning. In many centres learners access materials and manage their learning independently, but they also have access to staff for help. Many self-access centres are heavy users of technology and an increasing number of them are now offering online self-access learning opportunities. Some centres have developed novel ways of supporting language learning outside the context of the language classroom (also called 'language support') by developing software to monitor students' self-directed learning and by offering online support from teachers. Centre managers and support staff may need to have new roles defined for them to support students' efforts at self-directed learning: v. Mozzon-McPherson & Vismans (2001), who refer to a new job description, namely that of the "language adviser".

Problematic questions:

1. What are electronic materials?
2. Creating electronic materials online.
3. What is an authoring tool?
4. Using authoring tools to produce materials.
5. The advantages of Computer-based language learning programmes.
6. Define computer based language learning programmes;

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