THE APPLICATION OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LESSONS: A COMPULSORY ACTIVITY TO UPDATE OUR COURSES.

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ABSTRACT

Technological growth has proved to be one of the most outstanding characteristics of the twenty-first century. Language teachers need to take advantage of it in order to offer students a complete global updated education, even if adapting technology to language classes is not as easy as it sounds because it requires following a systematic process.

Throughout this work, the author proposes some steps to follow when trying to implement the so-called new technologies in the teaching of English as a foreign language.

We can divide the reasons that teachers may have to apply new technologies in the language classroom into two broad categories:

A. Reasons that can be applied to all aspects of education:

Technological advances almost always foster knowledge acquisition. Familiarity with technological advances is generally essential to live and evolve in a world that always tends to be demanding, like the one in which we live in this twenty-first century. Making use of technological advances is required to live in a globalized world.

B. Reasons that can be applied to the specific area of language teaching:

The fact that all teachers need to be updated in the most recent technological advances relating to the area, so that students can take advantage of them to get practice in the use of the foreign language. The fact that technological advances can reinforce the knowledge that students can obtain in the classroom. The above reasons lead us to propose a process of five steps to adapting new technologies in the language classroom:

• Developing a needs analysis;
• Developing an inventory for the new technologies that we will apply in the language classroom;
• Applying this new technologies inventory to the needs of students;
• Systematizing important information about technology;
• Piloting the application of the technology.
INTRODUCTION

The teaching of languages is an area in constant evolution, not only because of the appearance of new methods and approaches, but also because of the application of so-called new technologies. In this article, we use the term new technologies to refer to three collaborative communication tools – blogs, chat and wikis – as well as to an electronic resource called an online lecture.

A proposal for the implementation of the above technologies for the teaching of English as a foreign language is presented in this document as a result of their use to teach English at the Foreign Language Center (CELE) at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). As a model, we can take the case of Prof. María de la Paz Adelia Peña, who is in charge of implementing the use of chat sessions between Mexican and American students at the CELE UNAM Self Access Center. More information on her findings concerning the implementation of new technologies can be found in her thesis for the Master of Arts Program on Education Technology at Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey in Mexico.

1. POSSIBLE REASONS TO APPLY NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

When we communicate with each other we mix language with other modes of communication and other media. We combine speech with gestures and facial expressions. Digital texts are combined with pictures and sounds (Uszkoreit, 1997). Movies may contain spoken and written language. Thus, speech and information technologies overlap and interact with many other technologies that facilitate the processing of multimodal communication and multimedia documents. That is why new technologies should be adapted for language teaching. The specific reasons to do so can be roughly divided into two groups.

1.1. Reasons applicable to all aspects of education

If we see education as a concept that refers to the process in which students can learn something, we could say that new technologies can be applied to education because knowledge can be spread more effectively by their use. In other words, they can be used to transmit what people know about particular subjects. In general terms, the reasons teachers may have to apply new technologies, relating to all aspects of education, may include the following:

- Technological advances almost always foster knowledge acquisition.
- Familiarity with technological advances is generally essential to live and evolve in a world that always tends to be demanding like the one in which we live in this twenty-first century.
- Making use of technological advances is required to live in a globalized world.

1.2. Reasons applicable to the specific area of language teaching

Apart from transmitting information, new technologies can serve as a means to turn language into something that can be made available to many people, especially language students. In general terms, the reasons teachers may have to apply new technologies to the teaching of languages could be the following:
The fact that all teachers need to be updated in the most recent technological advances relating to the area, so that students can take advantage of them to get practice in the use of the foreign language. The fact that technological advances can reinforce the knowledge students can obtain in the classroom.

2. PROPOSAL FOR A PROCEDURE TO ADOPT NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Adopting new technologies in the language classroom is not as easy as it sounds if we want to structure this in a productive way that provides a good experience for our students. We have to consider different steps to achieve this.

2.1. The procedure

The procedure is formed by: developing a needs analysis; developing a new technologies inventory; establishing the way to adapt the new-technologies inventory to the needs of the students; systematizing important information about technology; and piloting the implementation of the technology.

2.2. The team

We must bear in mind that language teachers in charge of a class are not alone in the process. They will sometimes have to work and cooperate with graphic designers, engineers, language teachers in charge of the design of teaching materials, other language teachers, and even school authorities.

2.3. The focus

Teachers should always keep in mind that the most important focus of adopting new technologies in the language classroom is the student.

3. NEEDS ANALYSIS

Needs analyses are used in different areas. In language teaching, they help to examine the requirements that students have to obtain information about a certain phenomenon, situation or tool in detail in order to apply it to achieve more successful teaching of that language. Needs analyses are usually based on the information students provide in answer to a specific questionnaire designed previously on a specific topic.

3.1. Reasons to develop a needs analysis concerning the use of new technologies in the language classroom

It is very useful to develop a process of needs analysis so that we can really define: the goals; experience levels – including an understanding of how language students think the technologies will work; and the functions they want and need from them.

3.2. Positive aspects of using a needs analysis to consider the use of new technologies in the language classroom

The positive aspects of developing a needs analysis in the language classroom are as follows:

The student’s needs build a bridge between a good class and its designer – either the class teacher or another teacher who is in charge of that activity.

The student’s needs help to identify the future problems pupils might have, due to their experience levels and the functions they want and need from new technology.
The establishing of the right products for a the real class, such as, for example, a chart that systematically presents important information about new technology.

3.2.1. Aspects we have to be careful with before using a needs analysis to consider the use of new technologies in the language classroom

There are some aspects we have to consider carefully before using a needs analysis in the language classroom: some background knowledge of the population you will be working with; having good knowledge and understanding of the new technologies you plan to ask the population about; and previous validation of the main questionnaire used to obtain the information.

3.2.2. Aspects we have to be careful with after implementing a needs analysis about the use of new technologies in the language classroom

The aspects we have to consider before implementing a needs analysis in the language classroom are as follows:

The findings must always be expressed from the user’s perspective, and they need to be cross-related to each other, as well as to the impact of using the technology.

Ensuring that all student’s needs, in designing the class, relate to the use of new technologies.

Prior to designing the class, there must be validation of the student’s needs with respect to other students and, once this has been done, there must be acceptance that contradictory needs may remain.

Understanding of the nuances of needs and ensuring that these are reflected during the actual teaching of the class.

The fact that the teacher needs to keep asking his/her students until s/he has a true understanding of their needs.

The understanding that good application of new technologies in the language classroom can only be achieved from understanding the nuances of students’ needs.

4. NEW TECHNOLOGIES INVENTORY

As mentioned in the introduction, the new technologies whose application to a language lesson we are going to refer to are, in general terms, three collaborative communication tools –blogs, chat and wikis, as well as the electronic resource called on line lecture.

We would like to make clear that there are other kinds of technologies that due to the limit of time we are not considering, for example, computer social nets, face-book, hi5, twitter and mobile technologies.

4.1. Blogs

A blog (a contraction of the term web log) is a type of website, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries including commentaries, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. It is a way to present online information where entries are commonly displayed in reverse chronological order, using an informal and subjective style (Gerwerc, 2005: 13).

Many blogs provide commentaries or news on a particular theme, while others function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, web pages and other related media. The option for learners to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs. Most blogs are
primarily textual, although some focus on art (art blogs), photography (photo blogs), videos (video blogs), music (MP3 blogs) or audio (podcasting)

4.2. Chat
A chat is a form of technology, facilitating informal conversations between people from all over the world, that can be transformed into a tool with many interesting pedagogical properties (Estebanell, 1998: 1). The term chat can refer to any kind of communication over the Internet, but usually refers to direct one-on-one chat or text-based group chat (formally known as synchronous conferencing), using tools such as instant messengers, Internet relay chat, and talkers. The expression online chat comes from the word chat which means informal conversation.

4.3. Online lecture
An online lecture is an educational lecture designed to be posted online: lectures are recorded as video, audio or both, then uploaded and made available on a specially designed site. Students can go to a designated site to view the lecture online at a time which is convenient for them. Traditionally, oral education was possible only when teacher and student were in the same physical space; now, online lectures are possible with the advent of video communication. With the development of online lectures, teacher and student no longer have to be in the same vicinity to teach and learn, respectively.

There are certain advantages to online lecturing. Students may access online lectures posted on designated websites anywhere in the world, at any time they wish, as long as they have an Internet connection. They can also be repeated for the sake of note taking. However, two possible disadvantages should be mentioned, namely the lack of face-to-face interaction, and the fact that students cannot easily contact their instructors unless a communication link is also created.

4.4. Wikis
The users of a wiki can edit or change its content, add images, videos or podcasts, its editing is not performed by experts in new technology (Del Moral, 2007: 2).

A wiki is a website that allows the easy creation and editing of any number of interlinked web pages, via a web browser, using a simplified markup language or a WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) text editor. It could be said that it is the simplest online database that can possibly work. It is a Hawaiian word for fast and has been ‘acronymed’ to What I Know Is. Wikis are typically powered by wiki software and are often used to create collaborative websites, to power community websites, for personal note taking, in corporate Intranets, and in knowledge-management systems. Wikis may exist to serve a specific purpose and, in such cases, users use their editorial rights to remove material that is considered “off topic”. Such is the case with the collaborative encyclopedia, Wikipedia.
5. THE STRUCTURING OF A CHART TO SYSTEMATICALLY PRESENT IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT EACH TECHNOLOGY

Having provided some characteristics of the new technologies that we could readily apply in language classes, we have to think about the most suitable way to adapt them into each lesson. That is why designing a chart, that systematically presents important information about each new technology, is needed. To do so, we have to think about some different elements to structure such charts.

5.1. Characteristics of the new technologies

The first element we have to consider is a set of general characteristics for each new technology.

5.2. Technical aspects required to work with the new technologies

It is very important to understand that the use of technology does not only relate to the classroom, but also to other aspects such as personal computers, laptops, iPads, even cell phones and net books, as well as to both teachers and students, where being the first is sometimes crucial in the instruction, such as, for example, in the case of a forum, when they usually decide on the topic everybody is to discuss.

5.3. Language abilities that can be practised with the new technology

Depending on their intrinsic characteristics and the abilities to be practised in each class, new technologies can be applied differently to language classrooms. It is usually the teacher, who knows the program as well as the objectives, who is able to find a relationship among them.

5.4. Suggested time of use

It is not always possible or appropriate to include the use of new technology in a language lesson because, on the one hand, teachers must determine the right part of the term when those technologies will be useful to reinforce specific aspects of the program; and on the other hand, when students will be able to take advantage of the benefits technologies can vary. That is why recommendations for the times they can be used in a term are usually needed when structuring each new technology chart.

5.5. Possible activities

But not only the number of times is important, the time advocated for new-technology use, in or out of the classroom, also matters; some technologies may require a minimum number of activities and others more than what is to be developed.

6. ONE CHART PER NEW TECHNOLOGY

After defining the elements for each chart, to exemplify their use, four models are now presented. Figure 1 refers to the format for a chart containing general information about the use of new technologies in the language classroom. Figure 2 refers to the format for a chart containing general information about the use of blogs in the language classroom. Figure 3 refers to the format for a chart containing general information about the use of chat in the language classroom. Figure 4 refers to the format for a chart containing general information about the use of wikis in the language classroom; and figure 5 refers to the format for a chart containing general information about the use of online lectures in the language classroom.
### GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE USE OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN A LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General characteristics:</td>
<td>XXXXXXXXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required technical aspects:</td>
<td>XXXXXXXXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language abilities to be practised:</td>
<td>XXXXXXXXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggested time of use:</td>
<td>XXXXXXXXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible activities:</td>
<td>XXXXXXXXXX</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Format for a chart containing general information about the use of new technologies in the language classroom.

### GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE USE OF BLOGS IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General characteristics:</td>
<td>A blog can be maintained by one person, who could be the teacher or even a student. Students can add comments and images on a specific topic. It can be related to other blogs. Participants need to be collaborate when using it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required technical aspects:</td>
<td>The use of a PC, laptop, or iPad, or even the use of mobile technology such as an iPod touch, cell phone, pal or netbook. The availability of an Internet connection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language abilities to be practised:</td>
<td>Reading comprehension, Writing (informal messages), Listening (in case users include videos). Depending on the kind of blog, even listening to participants’ voices. Other: Grammar, vocabulary and cultural aspects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggested time of use:</td>
<td>It is suggested they be used at home. It is also suggested to add a new topic every day, so that students can put into practice the language knowledge they have just been practising. It should be used as many times as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible activities:</td>
<td>A topic for discussion can be established. Non-synchronous interaction between participants. Giving feedback. Reading the topics for discussion. Reading participants’ comments. Writing comments on the topic or about other comments. Depending on the kind of blog, even listening to participants’ voices. An administrator may be required.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Format for a chart containing general information about the use of blogs in the language classroom.
## GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE USE OF CHAT IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General characteristics:</th>
<th>By means of this, teacher and students can have informal general conversations with each other in real time, with or without the use of a webcam or a microphone.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Required technical aspects:</td>
<td>The use of a PC, laptop, or iPad. The availability of an Internet connection. The use of a webcam is optional.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language abilities to be practised:</td>
<td>Reading comprehension, Writing (informal conversation). Other: Grammar and vocabulary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggested time of use:</td>
<td>It can be used in class to practice conversations with other students in other cities. When it is used out of class, it is suggested that the conversations take place between a maximum of three people, so that it works well. It can be used once a week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible activities:</td>
<td>A topic to discuss can be established. Synchronous interaction between participants. A moderator may be required.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. Format for a chart containing general information about the use of chat in the language classroom.

## GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE USE OF WIKIS IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General characteristics:</th>
<th>Collaborative websites useful to create simple online databases.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Required technical aspects:</td>
<td>The use of a PC, laptop or iPad and the availability of an Internet connection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language abilities to be practised:</td>
<td>Reading comprehension and writing. Other: Collaborative abilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggested time of use:</td>
<td>Multiple contributions from students, that will depend on their knowledge of the topic, are required as frequently as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible activities:</td>
<td>It is useful to find a topic that is familiar to most of the students. This can be done by means of surveying students at the beginning of term. Once the main topics are known, the teacher can start the website, fostering self-correction. In that way, students will be able to make their own contributions. A person to remove material that is off topic is required, this could be the teacher or even a student.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. Format for a chart containing general information about the use of wikis in the language classroom.
GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE USE OF ONLINE LECTURES IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General characteristics:</th>
<th>Recorded lectures that are available for students to view on designed sites whenever and wherever they want. They do not foster any face-to-face interaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Required technical aspects:</td>
<td>The use of a PC, laptop, or iPad and the availability of an Internet connection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language abilities to be practised:</td>
<td>Listening comprehension and writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggested time of use:</td>
<td>They can be used in class but are mainly used at home due to the possibility of working with them as homework. They can be used twice a month, so that students can take notes about an academic topic, outside the classroom, to plan an essay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible activities:</td>
<td>Taking notes about a lecture in readiness for brainstorming to plan an academic essay.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5. Format for a chart containing general information about the use of online lectures in the language classroom.

7. PILOTING
Once we have designed one chart per new technology, it is time to pilot the way it all works in class, so that we can evaluate the outcomes and make any necessary changes for future applications coordinated by ourselves and/or by our colleagues.
REFERENCES

COLE, Ronald; MARIANI, Joseph; USZKOREIT, Hans; VARILE, Giovanni; ZAENEN, Annie; ZUE, Victor; and ZAMPOLLLI, Antonio (Eds.) 1997 Survey of the State of the Art in Human Language Technology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Giardini.


