

Digital Activities in Teaching/Learning a Foreign Language for Specific Purposes, Technical/Scientific Domain

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Abstract:

The present pandemic has determined the teachers to adopt new methods of on-line teaching and learning and the specific activities within the classes of foreign languages for special purposes, technical and scientific domain are part of these new orientations. Thus, the teachers adapted their materials to the on-line tendency by digitalizing their various courses. The present article focuses on several activities used within certain on-line apps dedicated to teaching foreign languages for specific purposes. In the first part we will make suggestions for the on-line didactic use of a video clip with *EdPuzzle* and *VideoAnt*. Next, we will present certain apps available for oral presentations during foreign language classes and we will demonstrate how to use *LearningApps* for the making of self-corrective exercises and on-line games. Finally, we will focus on *Jamboard* from *Google* as virtual board during the classes of foreign languages for specific purposes, technical and scientific domain.

Keywords: Didactic activities, On-line applications, Foreign language for specific purposes, Technical and scientific domain.

Introduction

The presence of the digital in our life is a reality that cannot be ignored anymore. The nowadays context of teaching/learning a foreign language for specific purposes (FLSP) imposed a series of modifications in the foreign languages' didactics. Each and every teacher had to adapt his own didactic style to the on-line teaching context brought by the epidemiologic situation in the entire world.

Lately, the FLSP teacher has been interested in creating didactic activities on-line and/or off-line for his students in order to set them in a learning context that is as authentic and as close to the reality of their future professional environment as possible. The teacher is responsible for the production of attractive didactic scenarios without leaving aside

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the correct usage of the foreign language and the digital instruments. Thus, these activities are both a way and an objective in the complex process of teaching/learning a foreign language for special purposes, technical and scientific domain.

In order to create, deliver and participate in digital didactic activities, one has to have first of all, a good Internet connection, but also various electronic devices (computer, microphone, webcam, speakers) that would facilitate the development of the FLSP courses. What is left for the teacher to do is to select, coordinate and suggest different didactic scenarios, choosing from the multitude of the authentic sources (articles, video clips, images, documentaries, games etc.) available on the Internet. The role of the teacher is to create didactic activities adapted to the respective learning situation, which would provoke the students to interactively participate, stimulating this way their interest for the digitally taught content.

We will discuss in this article several on-line didactic activities correlated with various e-learning platforms and applications used in the FLSP courses. Thus, we will present different pedagogic actions through which an on-line video clip can be exploited. We will also pay particular attention to certain applications used in the on-line oral presentations as well as other activities that can be created in a series of applications such as games or exercises of expressing ideas on a virtual board.

On-line Didactic Exploitation of a Video clip (*Edpuzzle*, *VideoAnt*) in teaching FLSP, Technical and Scientific Domain

The FLSP teachers can adapt their methods of teaching the foreign language for technical/scientific domain by exploiting certain videoclips, i.e. adding to them open questions, multiple choice exercises, true/false exercises, audio notes or various written/spoken commentaries. Based on our own experience as teachers, we can affirm that the students who learn FLSP, technical/scientific domain, are very attracted by this kind of didactic activities. We believe that it is much more captivating for the students to learn the vocabulary related to the functioning of a Diesel engine by watching a tutorial-videoclip that explains the four stages of this engine from the mechanical point of view. We also believe that the use of this application would increase the technical students' motivation to learn FLSP.

One of the web apps that allow the editing of the on-line video clips is *Edpuzzle*. This application has been created to didactically use the video clips on-line, and it has the following functions: cut, voiceover, questions. The videoclips' editing with the option „cut”

allows the choosing of the exact part which the teacher wishes to pedagogically exploit. The most important advantage of this function is that the teacher can save valuable class time by choosing only the videoclip fragment which focuses on the subject taught and is relevant for his students. The option “voiceover” works like a microphone. During the videoclip, the teacher can record his own voice asking various questions, making commentaries, or offering additional explanations. These recordings can be made in his mother tongue and/or foreign language and can offer information when certain situations of misunderstanding certain words or expressions from the technical/scientific domain appear. One last very useful option of *Edpuzzle* is „Questions”. With this function one can ask questions so that the teacher can check whether the students understand or not the message in the videoclip. Multiple choice questions, open-ended questions and notes can be added. The teacher can use multiple choice questions if he wishes to automatically write the students’ answers. To mark a correct answer the teacher clicks the green checkmark; moreover, he can also add as many answer options as he wishes, including the feed-back, too. The open-ended questions encourage the students’ critical thinking. The teacher can evaluate the students’ answers, by giving feed-back. The advantage of this type of questions is that it also allows audio answers, checking, thus, the students’ speaking skill – one very useful activity for the teaching and assessing the knowledge of a foreign language for specific purposes, technical and scientific domain.

The videoclip uploaded online through *Edpuzzle* can be publicly or privately shared. If the clip is privately shared, the teacher has the possibility to manage his own group of students by following and assessing the evolution of each and every one of them. In this case, the student has to create his own *Edpuzzle* account. If publicly shared, the activities’ videoclip is available to all *Edpuzzle* users.

The didactic activities created with the *Edpuzzle* app can be synchronized with various on-line teaching programs, like *Google Classroom*, *Moodle*, *Schoology*, *Blackboard*, *Power School*. Moreover, the app will soon allow the sharing of tasks with the classes created on the on-line Microsoft Teams platform. For the moment, without this function the teacher who uses Microsoft Teams as on-line teaching platform can share his own *Edpuzzle* account with the students. The video clip can be watched and the exercises can be solved directly, frontally, during the foreign language class, allowing the teacher to orally assess the students’ answers.

Another application that allows the didactic exploitation of an on-line video clip is *VideoAnt*. In this case, the FLSP teacher together with his students can annotate and comment on an on-line videoclip during its watching. The pedagogic advantages of this app include the didactic ones of using video resources, oral and written interactions with the students and the re-writing of these interactions for a later revision.

This application can be exploited freely by the FLSP teacher after he created an account. Only videoclips imported from *You Tube* can be used, and *VideoAnt* works as a virtual screen sharing of an on-line presentation in order to allow the watching and commenting of a video clip for more participants. To create a virtual meeting, the teacher has only to name the class during which the video clip will be watched and to invite the students by sending them a link. The screen will be divided into two parts: on one part the video will be watched on-line, on the other open part, each participant is invited to make commentaries which lead to the exchange of new ideas and impressions about the respective video clip. One of the advantages of this app is that the students do not have to make an account. At the end of the session, the teacher can save all the commentaries and send them to his students via e-mail or message.

The use of *VideoAnt* in the process of FLSP teaching, technical and scientific domain, can stir the interest of the students from the Informatics domain, for example. The watching of a video clip through *VideoAnt* in which various social networks used by the young people nowadays are presented can generate many commentaries pro or against the use of a certain type of social network among students. All these opinions can be written down in this app and can become a starting point for different texts or discourses in which the students have to support their point of view on a certain subject suggested by the teacher. We think that this application offers the students a higher degree of liberty in expressing their own opinion, and the use of the ideas collected during the videoclip contributes to the later development of the writing and speaking skills.

Oral Presentations in FLSP Didactics

For the technical students, one of the challenges of oral presentation delivery is speaking in public. Language fluency is not a guarantee that this delivery will go smoothly, and other aspects should also be taken into consideration: the fact that the students are non-native speakers, cultural matters, the lack of experience in delivering a presentation in their mother tongue etc.

For the final exam, the technical students are required to have their support material as visual aids presented in *PowerPoint* or *Prezi* and for that, a whole seminar is dedicated to how to make these visual aids.

PowerPoint represents an excellent tool for organizing and presenting the information in the most attractive possible way, but it can also be menacing due to its many features and options. Therefore, at the beginning of the class the students will be grouped and each group will make a part of their *PowerPoint* presentation with the technical material chosen by them. They have to explore the program and, later on, to present their findings in front of their colleagues. After all groups have finished presenting their results, the teacher offers a sample by showing a sample of a presentation. At this point, it is important to show them how to create the various graphs/charts and the 3D options offered by *PowerPoint* as they are technical students focused rather on technological subjects.

A very useful feature is offered by *Google Slides*. As mentioned before, one of the major challenges for the technical students and not only is the public speaking, mainly the use of their voice. This app allows the students to record themselves during the class when practicing the delivering of their presentation and then to listen to themselves and correct their use of voice.

In the case of presentation delivery, the main purpose is to keep alive the audience's interest for the presented material and this goes for the teacher, too. An interactive presentation can be the best solution and, in this respect, *Kahoot* is of great help. This program cannot be used for the making of visual aids, but one can import the *PowerPoint* presentation and, most importantly, can insert quizzes during it, checking in real time whether the audience (be it technical students) understands the information and making thus the presentation as attractive as possible.

Interactive Activities in FLSP, Technical/Scientific Domain

The FLSP teacher is the main performer that contributes to the creating of certain interactive activities dedicated to breaking the monotony of the class, offering, thus, the students the necessary motivation to learn the foreign language. One of the applications that allow the making of interactive on-line activities is *LearningApps*. In the case of this app, the teacher creates various activities and types of self-corrective exercises for his students in order to systematize and repeat the language/vocabulary content taught previously.

After creating an account within the app, the teacher can choose from the multitude of templates for self-corrective exercises or games adaptable to the development of the class. These interactive activities are called *apps*. The different created apps can be saved either privately so that the other users with *LearningApps* accounts can see their own exercises, or publicly, so that everybody can have access to the link with the suggested exercise or game. *LearningApps* proposes a high variety of exercises and games which can be played by many students at the same time. Among these, several types on the *LearningApps* site can be mentioned: matching pairs, group assignment, number line, simple order, free text input, matching pairs on images, multiple-choice quiz, cloze text, audio/video with notices, *The Millionaire Game*, *Group-Puzzle*, crossword, word grid, *Where is what?*, *Guess the word*, *Horse race*, *Pairing game*, *Guess?*, matching matrix, fill table, quiz with text input.

With the help of *LearningApps*, the teacher can send an app to each student's account. This allows the distribution of various exercises to the students, whose activities can be monitored statistically. At the same time, the teacher can also insert certain games as front activity with the whole class, sharing the screen with the on-line activities on the different platforms used for teaching/learning (*Microsoft Teams*, *Google Classroom*, *Zoom* etc).

During the FLSP technical/scientific domain teaching, we noticed that these apps can be used specially to reinforce grammar. It is a well-known fact that sometimes the grammar exercises and aspects can be monotonous for the students, demotivating them. Therefore, to systematize the present indicative (a tense highly used in technical and scientific texts) we suggest games like *Horse Race* from *LearningApps*, which would bring *a breath of fresh air* to the reinforcement of the various grammar notions.

Another application that supports the creating of on-line interactive activities is *Jamboard* from *Google*. *Jamboard* works like an on-line virtual interactive board. The use of this on-line application during the FLSP, technical/scientific domain contributes significantly to the improvement of the students' writing skill. Thus, the teacher can write on *Jamboard* the different solutions to the suggested exercises or various new words, unknown to the students, or can invite them to give the correct option to the exercises in progress.

The way to access *Jamboard* is very simple. The teacher sends the students the virtual board's link via message or e-mail, they access the link without the need of an account and from that moment on, the lesson can go on. *Jamboard* offers various functionalities like the

following: setting of the background, the use of colors for the font type, deleting the words or the on-line correction of misspelled words, insertion of images, using the laser to underline certain ideas.

One of the interactive activities used very often during the FLSP classes within *Jamboard* comes in the form of a brainstorming. The teacher displays on *Jamboard* a major theme to be discussed during the FLSP class (for example: “The best communication means for the professional domain is...because...”) and this can be the trigger of the lesson correlated with the one about the professional e-mail. The students are invited to write on *Jamboard* all their ideas, words that come to their minds. The written expressions represent the starting point of the subject’s introduction as well as an essential point in the development of the students’ motivation for the improvement of their professional writing skill. Thus, *Jamboard* from *Google*, this application for a virtual board, can successfully replace the physical board from an ordinary classroom.

Conclusion

Nowadays the FLSP teacher cannot imagine the foreign language class without the necessary digital instruments which represent the future of teaching. The modern technology makes the lesson a lot more attractive increasing, thus, the motivation of the student in general, and in particular that of the technical student.

Another advantage of the use of digital tools is represented by the high degree of authenticity brought to the class, an approach closer to the real life which obviously improves the students’ learning of a foreign language for specific purposes, technical and scientific domain.

On the other hand, one disadvantage of these programs is that they are time consuming for the FLSP teacher for whom the entire preparation of the lesson takes more time: he must take into consideration not only the specialized material as support for his class, but also only those programs that can be best used with the specific types of texts or language subjects.

In the end, if the result is the technical students’ improvement of foreign language use, the effort is worth making. The applications mentioned above are meant to contribute to the efficiency of on-line teaching and could offer valuable support for less experienced teachers in digital matters. However, they yield better results when used in combination with frontal teaching strategies.

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