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COMPUTER BASED TEACHING IN DISTANCE LEARNING DEPARTMENT
OF PHILOLOGICAL FACULTY

The paper is an attempt to show how to introduce elements of distance teaching in philology studies. The key feature of these studies is that the most frequent method of education are workshops and seminars, at which the master-student relationship dominates and the direct thought exchange is fundamental and irreplaceable by any other form of the didactic offer. It appears however, that new technologies can be made use of, along with certain types of distance teaching, despite troubles with breaching the psychological barrier and technical problems. The paper gives factual results of such attempts, illustrating them with products created by lecturers and students. The presentation focuses on the effects of using the new technologies at B.A. and master’s degree seminars on methods of foreign language teaching, literature and linguistics in the past two years, at the Institute of Roman Philology.

1. KEY FEATURES OF PHILOLOGICAL STUDIES

The aim of the Authors is to show how to introduce elements of distance learning in philological studies. In this age of the uniting Europe, according to the European Council’s recommendation, citizens of the continent ought to receive education allowing them to communicate in their mother tongue, in a language serving as lingua franca, finally in a language of a neighbouring country or other European one. This forces us to adjust to these requirements not only the educational system, but also methods of education, including the school curricula and syllabuses, which take into account the different way of acquiring a foreign language – not the second after the mother tongue, but the third (after the mother tongue and the foreign language).

Philological studies have to complete this new assignment, for they prepare future foreign languages teachers and have to meet the current demands by educating competent staff. Philological studies are also something else than language courses. Nobody teaches Polish at Polish philology, although at foreign philologies courses improving the command of foreign languages account for a big part of the didactic offer. They will account for a greater part, due to introductions of second speciality options, where the candidates can start even from the zero level and receive vast amounts of courses from the very beginning (in order to fathom also theory in the following years).

Teaching foreign languages has always been associated with a direct transfer of skills. It was the teacher – the master, who explained, trained and corrected mistakes; with his assistance one reached perfection. The communication scheme took into account the sender and the receiver of a message.

Even Roman Jakobson, one of the most famous linguists of the 20th century, referring to Karl Bühler, considered communication functions in relation to the sender and the receiver. The basic

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distinction of the communication functions may be used for analyzing statements on many levels, for behind this concise division there is a multitude of possibilities:

- The expressive (emotive) function’s purpose is to identify the interlocutor’s gender, age and social status.
- The impressive (imperative, conative or appellative) function’s purpose is to distinguish signs and traces – consciously or unconsciously communicated information about feelings, mood and emotions, which the author felt in the moment of the statement.
- Finally – the most important function – referential (denotative, cognitive or symbolic) applies for “referring the user’s consciousness to specified objects and phenomena of the extralingual world, by attributing such objects and phenomena to specified linguistic expressions.” (Polanński 1995: 168); thus to literal meanings of the communicated contents.

Roman Jakobson, deepening Karl Bühler’s theories, distinguished three additional communication functions: phatic, poetic and metalinguistic. (Baylon, Mignot, 1999).

- The phatic function is executed by means of establishing and maintaining the contact between interlocutors, using various verbal and nonverbal strategies. The kind of these strategies depends on the interlocutor’s lingual practice and his motivation.
- The poetic function refers to phonetical, grammatical or lexical features of the statement’s structure, in order to make the receiver pay attention to these aspects of the text as strongly as to the content itself. Various kinds of puns are a good example.
- The metalinguistic function (quoted here only pro forma) is executed by means used for treating the language as a code (system), i.e. defining or expressing oneself about language.

2. POSSIBILITIES OF USING NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN EDUCATING PHILOLOGISTS

Every philologist is aware of the importance and significance of the mentioned communication functions and has to take this knowledge into consideration not only while teaching a language, but also while teaching how to teach a language. As for purely theoretical classes, the key feature of these studies is that the most frequent method of education are workshops and seminars, at which the master-student relationship dominates and the direct thought exchange is fundamental and irreplaceable by any other form of the didactic offer.

This tradition meets new challenges: the limited number of credit hours which is insufficient to fully accomplish every goal, the limited financial means and, finally, the new reality, in which the traditional philological studies are reckoned to be an anachronism which does not prepare to cope with problems in the contemporary, technicized world.

It appears, however, that new technologies can be made use of, along with certain types of distance learning, despite troubles with breaching the psychological barrier and technical problems. The current legal regulations give us merely a possibility of taking the new technologies into consideration while teaching traditionally. This transitional stage, leading to gradual replacing parts of the didactic offer with numerous forms of distance learning, must not be wasted, but made use of in order to make teachers accustomed to the new conditions of teaching various subjects.

Of course, not all the communication functions are taken into account. The choice is made by separating the material which we should definitely communicate by direct contact from the one which can be mastered and revised autonomously, at least at certain stages. Thus, we give factual results of such attempts, illustrating them with products created by lecturers and students. The presentation focuses on the effects of using the new technologies at B.A. and master’s degree
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seminars on methods of foreign language teaching, literature and linguistics in the past two years, at the Institute of Roman Philology.

The seminars consist of 60 thematic units. Their aim is to remind, systematise and extend the knowledge of the methodology of humanistic research, especially including detailed applications in the methods of foreign language teaching, both in basic and applied research. The purpose of the course is to prepare and conduct a research on a subject determined by each student.

The plan is arranged so as to allow the students to learn the stages of the research process, starting from determining a problem and stating hypotheses or research questions, through selecting indicators, interviewees and techniques of collecting data, constructing research tools, ending at conducting the designed research and implementing its results. At every stage of the scientific process it is possible and necessary to use the new technologies.

Too rarely do humanists make use of databases, while creating questionnaires and handling data traditionally. Moreover, they are unable to create didactic aides, neither a multimedia presentation, nor evaluation tools. Even not knowing any programming rules, it is already possible to use computer applications. The main difficulties are psychological inhibitions, which are, however, easily defeated by the students.

What we mention is an example of using the new technologies and implementing the elements of distance learning into seminars on the methods of foreign language teaching, for it accumulates many possibilities, used only selectively in other kinds of classes.

2.1. THEMATIC BROWSERS OF PREVIOUSLY SELECTED, THEORETICAL ONLINE MATERIALS CONCERNING A GIVEN TOPIC: AUTHORS, RECEIVERS, PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS.

At the stage of collecting information, apart from making use of the available databases and browsers, the students use browsers prepared by the lecturers. Not only do contents selected in this way guarantee a faster access to the materials, but also, most importantly, make the lecturer certain, that the quality of the online offer fulfils his expectations.

Thus, for years we have been placing interesting links on our own site, while simultaneously including them in the bibliography and systematically referring the students to them, as their duties and homework.

Fig. 1. An example of a site with a description of the recommended dictionaries, compiled during the master’s degree seminar on the methods of French language teaching, under H. Widla’s supervision.
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The menu of this catalogue refers also to links to the materials prepared by the lecturers (*.doc, *.rtf and *.pps) and the recommended lectures, which are available online. It is important especially while working with groups studying at the external Centre in Rybnik, 50 km away from the home Institute, and allows maintaining a constant contact with the students, for whom the computers in the external Centre’s reading room have been made accessible.

![Fig. 2. An example of a site with materials for teaching 16th-20th century French literature, compiled during the master’s degree seminar on the methods of French language teaching, under H. Widła’s supervision.](image)

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<td>3. VICTOR HUGO</td>
<td>4. HONORÉ DE BALZAC</td>
<td>5. STENDHAL (HONORÉ DEYRE)</td>
<td>6. THÉOPHILE GAUTIER</td>
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It serves perfectly as a virtual library. Not only does it contain links to an original version of each book, but also to a selection of websites about the authors’ lives and works. It is useful especially in the external Centre, where the library is still being established and is unable to buy such an enormous number of foreign writings, needed by the 60-person groups of students. Numerous websites of this kind, especially for civilization learning, have been created, since the number of credit hours is insufficient to successfully deliver cultural content in a foreign language.

2.2. BROWSERS OF SELECTED ONLINE EXERCISES: AUTHORS, RECEIVERS AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

The browsers of the online exercises have a similar purpose. After taking the receiver’s skills and needs into account, he is directed to a particular URL. The materials have to be selected from an enormous number of offers, yet it is worthy of making an effort. Such closed, autocorrecting exercises allow the student to aim at mastering the given competence, concerning reception or production (both verbal and written), up to the upper-intermediate level. They increase especially the phonetical and morphosyntactical proficiency.
2.3. INTERACTIVE EXERCISES CREATED BY STUDENTS AND EXAMPLES OF THEIR PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

The foreign language teacher’s task is also to match the materials to the student’s individual needs. It is the teacher who decides which contents should be additionally practiced or supplemented. Nowadays, it is difficult to find a perfect exercise, fulfilling all the demanded criteria. Thus, it is much better to design such an exercise oneself. That is why programming interactive, autocorrecting exercises with a timer and links to the rules, is among the basic students’ skills. Our students use a freeware Canadian application Hot Potatoes. The following examples show 4 exercises out of over 200, designed in this academic year by the B.A. seminars’ participants, under Dr. Małgorzata Twardoń’s surveillance. Among the most popular exercises are: gap filling exercises, crosswords, matching exercises and multiple choice tests.
Fig. 4. An autocorrecting, multichoice test with a timer and a possibility of displaying either the entire exercise, or its fragments. The colour indicates the difficulty level.

Fig. 5. An autocorrecting, gap-filling exercise with assistance and a list of letters with French grave marks.
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Fig. 6. An example of crosswords, with a link to the assistance.

Fig. 7. An autocorrecting, lexical matching exercise with a timer.
2.4. PREPARATION FOR “EXPOSÉ – DISCUSSION” DEFENCES OF DISSERTATIONS, USING NEW TECHNOLOGIES

The defences of dissertations have also been updated in accord with the contemporary requirements. The currently beginning seminars are to change the method of defending the dissertations. Each graduate is obliged to present the master’s thesis using the new technologies (Power Point presentations). Each stage of the scientific procedure has to be described and illustrated in details. Not until the presentation is finished shall the commission begin to ask questions.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The transitional stage before accepting distance learning as a rightful part of the didactic offer has been used to breach the huge psychological barrier among lecturers, not accustomed to making daily use of the new technologies and disbelieving in benefits provided by each technological novelty. Their resistance is justified by the negative opinions about the usefulness of linguistic laboratories, which turned out to be a very expensive mistake.

It appears that the philological studies are an appropriate place for distance learning, and although it is impossible to take advantage of it as efficiently as elsewhere, it seems tempting to support, or even replace considerable parts of the didactic offer with distance learning, for it is the advanced level of language proficiency, at which the biggest autonomy in learning is postulated.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

[12] Material from the CONCORDE – Multimedia team, founded by the French Embassy in Poland and the National In-Service Teacher Training Center, cooperating with Interkl@sa, and from the training “Multimédia dans l’enseignement des langues étrangères” in CAVILAM – Vichy