Multimedia in the Teaching of Foreign Languages

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Abstract
Multimedia has an enormous impact on the whole society since it is nowadays exploited in many industries (e.g. engineering or medicine) and as a common means of reference (e.g. encyclopaedias or dictionaries). Thanks to its great potential for learning, multimedia is also widely used in the teaching of foreign languages. This article gives an explanation of the term multimedia; states reasons why it should be used in foreign language teaching; outlines its important role in the acquisition of second language learning; illustrates how multimedia is delivered in foreign language teaching; and provides a list of web sites with their descriptions which L2 English teachers can exploit in their classes.

Keywords
foreign languages; multimedia; resources; teachers

Introduction
With the boom of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the past 20 years, the teaching of foreign language (FLT) has become inconceivable without implementing them. More and more teachers started to explore various kinds of ICT in order to keep up with their students (cf. Meiers, 2009). Furthermore, they began to exploit them in their classes to make their students motivated. This is also true for language teachers. One of the areas of ICT is multimedia. The word itself consists of two words: multi, which means various and media, which refers to any hardware (e.g. computer, television, interactive whiteboards or mobile phone) or software used for communicating (e.g. e-mail or videoconferencing).

The term itself was firstly used by singer and artist Bob Goldstein during his show in a New York club in 1966 (Zuras, 2010). However, it took 27 years when the definition of the word was provided by Tay Vaughan in 1993. He defined multimedia as follows: Multimedia is any combination of text, graphic art, sound, animation, and video that is delivered by computer (Vaughan, 1993, p. 3). Nowadays, multimedia is characterized as a combination of text, audio, still images, animation, video, or interactivity content forms. Particularly, the interactivity plays an important role because it differs a multimedia work from a
classic one (e.g. film) or a document, which only combines a text with graphs, tables and pictures (cf. Dostál, 2009; Pavlovkin, 2007; Sultan, 2013).

Multimedia can be divided into linear (e.g. an e-book) or non-linear (e.g. a video game or a self-paced eLearning course). The users of linear media usually have no control of the multimedia content. They are only passive receivers. However, the users of non-linear multimedia are able to interact with the content. It is a two-way communication then.

Generally, multimedia has an enormous effect on the whole society. Multimedia is nowadays used in many industries, such as engineering in the form of Computer-aided design (CAD), medicine for virtual surgeries or in entertainment in the form of video games. In addition, multimedia is also exploited for education and training, especially for young learners. Various educational programmes try to attract these learners and make their learning interesting and entertaining. These programmes are usually called *edutainment*, which is a blended word of education and entertainment. Moreover, multimedia is used as a common means of reference, such as encyclopaedias or dictionaries.

**Multimedia as a teaching resource in FLT**

Multimedia is undoubtedly important for FLT because it is known that they concurrently affect more senses at one time. This is not a new finding since this idea was already promoted by great teacher of nations - Jan Ámos Komenský (Patočka, 1958) in the 17th century who insisted on presenting teaching matter to as many senses as possible. Two centuries later Edgar Dale, an American scholar, designed the so-called *Cone of Experience* (Dale, 1946), which demonstrates how people generally remember things and experiences and what they are able to do (Figure 1).

Similarly, Lindfors (1987) points out that multimedia can provide a sensory and real learning experience; it presents a greater potential for learning. Furthermore, multimedia can serve as an important tool for managers and students in their efforts to connect and apply classroom theory-based learning with the analysis of real-world problems (cf. Mbarha, Bagarukayo, Shipps, Hingorami, Stokes et al., 2010). In addition, Mayer (1999, 2003) claims that multimedia promotes deeper learning.

Thus, multimedia should be an inseparable part of FLT in order to facilitate FLT and help with the acquisition of second language (L2) learning. At present multimedia is a common teaching resource, aid or tool in foreign language (FL) classes since it is:

- modern/fashionable;
- up-to-date as it can be usually easily modified;
- user-friendly;
- relatively inexpensive;
- eye-catching/appealing to students;
- stimulating; and simply, a natural means of student’s everyday use.

Moreover, the exploitation of multimedia in FLT changes the traditional form of teaching (cf. Lynch, 2012; Parveen, & Rajesh, 2011).

Figure 1: Dale’s Cone of Experience

Dale’s Cone of Experience

Teachers become rather facilitators and mediators and learning focuses more on students themselves. On the one hand, it increases their autonomy, but on the other hand, it imposes greater demands on them and makes them responsible for their own learning.

Multimedia in FLT is delivered through web pages; this is the so-called web-based multimedia, or it is delivered through compact discs and then it is called the CD-based multimedia. Table 1 below shows differences between these two kinds of multimedia (Sultan, 2013).

Table 1: A description of differences between the web-based and the CD-based multimedia (Sultan, 2013)
FL teachers use both types of multimedia delivery. They usually use CDs as counterparts to their course books. And they exploit the web sites to enliven their language classes and make their lessons more attractive. Below there is a list of tried and tested websites by English language teachers (cf. Šimonová, 2012) which they use in their teaching.

1. Youtube.com is a website which is widely used by English teachers because it affects most of student’s senses and develops all four language skills at a time: listening, reading, writing and speaking. Figure 2 below illustrates a song through which children can learn words for colours in English.

Figure 2: A song for learning colours in English

2. ToLearnEnglish.com is another useful website where L2 English teachers can find a lot of ideas and
ready-made materials for all ages. Figure 3 below presents various activities available for young learners of English.

Figure 3: A web page for young learners of English and its offers

3. TeachingEnglish.org.uk is a website which was developed by the British Council and BBC. Besides teacher training, teacher development, exams in English, and various events, this site also serves as a valuable resource for L2 English teachers. It offers plans and activities, completed with worksheets to download, for primary, secondary and adult teachers. Figure 4 below shows a ready-made material for talking about Christmas with young learners of English.

Figure 4: An example of a lesson on Christmas for young learners of English
4. HelpForEnglish.cz is a website developed by a Czech teacher of English. It again focuses on all age levels and offers a great number of teaching resources, such as tests, grammar and vocabulary exercises, pronunciation, reading and listening activities, quizzes, and many more tips. Figure 5 provides an introductory web page.

Figure 5: An introductory web page of Help for English

5. Lesson Sense.com is a website with worksheets, lesson ideas and plans for pre-school, kindergarten, first grade and other elementary school students on a wide range of themes and topics. Original lesson materials are free to download for usage in English classrooms or at home. Each topic comes with ideas, crafts and materials for lessons. Figure 6 below provides ready-made flash cards on the topic of Food.

Figure 6: An example of flashcards on the topic of Food
6. *BusyTeacher.org* is another website which supplies ready-made worksheets on different everyday and seasonal topics for English teachers. In addition, it provides ESL (English as a second language) articles, classroom management worksheets, flashcards, classroom posters and other materials. Once again this website covers all age groups. In addition, Figure 7 below illustrates how the topic of *Family* can be taught in an entertaining way with the help of using the family tree of the Simpsons.

Figure 7: An example of teaching the topic of *Family*

6. *ToolsForEducators.com* is a versatile website, full of custom worksheets, games, crosswords, and other resources. Moreover, it is aimed not only at teaching English, but also at teaching other languages, such as Spanish, German, Portuguese, Italian, Turkish, Swedish, or French. Figure 8 presents an introductory web page.

Figure 8: An introductory web page of *Tools for Educators*

6. *ListentoEnglish.com* is a podcast website for the intermediate and advanced learners of English, mostly aimed at adult learners. The podcasts on this site help to improve English vocabulary, pronunciation and listening skills.

Figure 9: An example of a podcast on *School dinners* in the UK
They are quite short (5 or 6 minutes) and delivered in clearly spoken English. Many are linked to grammar and vocabulary notes, exercises or quizzes. See Figure 9 which provides a podcast on School dinners in the UK.

**Conclusion**

At present multimedia is part and parcel of FLT since it has a positive effect on the development of L2 language acquisition (cf. Sperling, Seyedmonic, Aleksic, & Meadows, 2003). Nevertheless, although multimedia is a good teaching resource/aid, it must be carefully chosen to suit a particular teaching situation and to meet specific needs of students because not all kinds of multimedia are relevant for teaching or learning situations (cf. Myer & Moreno, 2002).

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**References**


Web sites used for Figures 26-34


Figure 27. A song for learning colours in English. Retrieved August 3, 2013, from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRNy2175tCc


Figure 32. An example of teaching the topic of Family. Retrieved August 3, 2013, from http://busyteacher.org/13334-the-simpsons-family-members.html

Figure 34. An example of a podcast on School dinners in the UK. Retrieved August 3, 2013, from http://www.listen-to-english.com/index.php?id=577

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