NEW TECHNOLOGY IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Olha Svyrydiuk (Uman)

Ukraine

Technology is big part of language learning throughout the world at all different levels. We are as likely to find it in the primary sector as much as in adult education.

We no longer need to make the case for computers to be provided in education, because computers are there in abundance in all their modern forms. We may see traditional computers in labs, teachers and students walking around with laptops or tablet PCs, and many people will have a mobile phone in their pocket that is capable of doing rather more than the mainframe computers that started computer-assisted language learning in the 1960s. I do recognize that there are many kinds of digital divices, and that this is not true everywhere.

What is still sometimes an issue is the reliability of these technologies for classroom use. This can discourage teachers from making use of technology as often as they would want to. It's compounded by the fact that, if these teachers are working in schools, they are faced with classes of learners who may, on the surface at least, appear to be more digitally competent than their teachers are. Learners can therefore challenge their teachers, in ways that put the latter off using the technologies that could potentially make such a difference to what happens in the classroom.

In his recent book for the British Council, *Innovations in learning technologies for English language teaching*, Gary Motteram argue that digital technologies are ideally placed to help teachers working with learners, and learners working independently, to do the necessary 'languaging' (**M. Swain**) that makes their language development possible. He is talking here about doing things with language rather than just learning about language. Swain argues that learners can't simply develop based on input. We must engage with other people using that language, and try to make meaning together. Whenever I speak or write something, if I don't produce language with someone else in mind, I have no way of knowing whether others can understand what I say or write. Of course, I need to read

and listen as well, but unless I progress to this further stage, I can't complete the process.

If we take writing as a starting point, technology in the form of word processors (and the many other ways we now have of producing text) allows us to work at the language. We go through a process of creating and re-creating text until it is fully comprehensible to others and is accurate. We can create a draft, show it to others and, based on feedback, can make changes to improve the text. The tools can also help us by showing that our spelling or grammar needs work, too. Technology makes this much easier, and makes it more likely that learners will engage with the editing process to produce the highest-quality text that they can. This writing can then be displayed for others to look at and comment on.

Trying to find ways for people to do meaningful spoken language practice in a class can be very challenging, particularly if, as a teacher, you lack confidence in your own spoken language skills. Linking your class to other classes around the world, using tools such as video conferencing, can give a reason for a learner to ask a question and then try to understand the response. It might also provide support for the teacher, too. The technology mediates the process, getting language out there and giving feedback that shows whether someone has or hasn't understood what you have said.

Another area that technology supports very effectively is project work. We have always tried to encourage learners to learn about things through language. Getting learners to do work about topics that are of interest to them, or topics that are taught in other parts of the curriculum (sometimes called Content and Language Integrated Learning or CLIL) is a great way to improve their skills. Technology makes this possible wherever you are in the world. Teachers and learners can go online to read or listen to material about different areas of interest, and can then write or speak about what they have discovered, telling others in the class or other classes elsewhere in the world.

Mobile learning (or m-learning) is the ability to learn anywhere and at any time using a portable electronic device. Mobile learning is less structured than e-learning, but in my opinion complements the latter perfectly.

Our world today is obsessed with doing everything quickly, learning included. Self-study is obviously important in language learning. As little as one hour a week of self-study can boost a student's progress immensely. Yet the majority of students have chosen to study online due to time restrictions, and in their first lesson, they make it quite clear they have no time for homework. So, how do we motivate busy students to find the time?

As the use of mobile technology is increasing, why not offer students the possibility to study anytime, anyplace and at their own convenience through their mobile devices? I get my students started with small, realistic homework activities. I request that my students spend just five or ten minutes a day on English. I introduce them to some of the amazing apps available and encourage them to learn in a mobile way. And it works.

There are hundreds of mobile phone apps available and it's possible to find free options suited to students on a budget. Here are my top five free apps that students can use for extra practice:

British Council apps offer a huge choice for smart phones. You can look at the options on their webpage and download the apps on Google Play, Apple's App Store or using a QR code. I particularly like 'Johnny Grammar's Word Challenge' - it's a fun way to improve grammar.

Duolingo is a wonderful app that has just won the 'Best education start-up award'. It's designed like a game and is pretty addictive. It's free, contains no adverts and is very effective.

Two min English is free, has no adverts and contains more than two hundred two-minute video lessons on a variety of topics e.g., social English, business English, travel English, common mistakes in English, idioms and phrases.

Game to learn English powowbox is a multi-level game. Once downloaded, it appears as English tracker. The first three levels are free. You have to spot the

mistake – if you get it wrong, you receive a clear explanation. It's fun and easy to play.

Real English offers a variety of apps at different levels – business and conversation apps at beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels. The apps are free, but they contain adverts. Each app contains 20 lessons that focus on specific grammar/vocabulary areas. Each lesson is made up of five parts.

Why not encourage your students to be creative and use the technology at their literal fingertips to prepare homework activities? I've chosen a few apps and looked at some of their educational possibilities:

Whatsapp is a mobile messaging app which allows you to exchange messages. Users can create groups, send each other unlimited images, video and audio media messages over an internet connection.

References

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