

DEVELOPMENT OF ONLINE ESP COURSES

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Summary

The University of Debrecen has recently completed a multi-year project towards introducing online courses for students taking ESP across the curriculum. The University of Debrecen integrates foreign language teaching into the degree programs, and its main mission is to prepare students for the relevant state language examination as well as for the requirements of the international labor market. The present foreign language training project at the University of Debrecen intends to meet the needs of the labor market. “Szak-nyelv-tudás” – Az idegen nyelvi képzési rendszer fejlesztése a Debreceni Egyetemen (TÁMOP 4.1.2.D-12/1/KONYV-2012-0008. “Technical language skills” – Improving foreign language training programs at the University of Debrecen) (<http://szaknyelvtudas.unideb.hu>). This paper looks at the issue of content in online course design.

Keywords: Content and Language Integrated Learning, emerging technologies, online learning, collaborative learning.

The project on improving foreign language training programs at the University of Debrecen aims to foster multilingualism and student mobility in higher education in keeping with European Union policy. To accomplish these goals, online courses have been implemented across all departments. Unlike CLIL, where content subjects are taught through the medium of a foreign language, in our approach, both content and foreign language acquisition are enhanced through cooperation between ESP teachers, subject departments and participants from regional administration and commerce. In particular, our classes combined several main parameters: content (subject matter), communication (language learning and using), cognition (learning and thinking processes) and culture (developing intercultural understanding and global citizenship).

In addition to face-to-face classroom instruction, an online learning environment has been devised to cater to digital-age learners. As Czeller *et al.* remarked, modern processes in higher education “have thrown new light on L2 skills and thus the role and methods of L2 teaching” (2015). An ESP input-rich website was devised through the cooperation of ESP and IT experts. On the site, ESP lessons provide students with guidelines and general information; learning objects and instructions are all in the target language. Lesson points attempt to foster learners’ interaction in English with peers and instructors. Students and content lecturers can communicate in-class and without, focusing on both self-study and in-class contact. It is of paramount importance to note that all of the tools used to create this innovative learning environment, including the website builder, are free to participating students. (Sfard, 1998)

When designing courses online, the questions of how best to transfer content, while ensuring the targeted language development outputs are achievable for a given group of students is difficult. (Weller, 2007) Questions, such as how best to fit learning objectives to types of online tools and exercises make careful planning necessary. In other words, there will be no real knowledge transfer in a purely web-based environment unless sound ESP pedagogy is used in the design and reinforcement of learning objectives, as one builds the website. This entails a true integration of

ESP and web requiring the principles of electronic testing design to create student-focused web environments for L2/ESP knowledge creation.

Students in the “Technical language skills” program received instruction highly targeted to a set of learning objectives compiled together with specialist faculties, city administration and regional business leaders. The inputs received were often at odds with each other, so the ESP teachers working to devise the new web-based learning program content were challenged to fulfill the requests, while still meeting the L2 learning requirements of Hungarian university students. Texts for listening comprehension, reading comprehension and CLOZE exercises, among others, were collected, compiled, edited and selected for final inclusion in the web database. In order to better assist the Hungarian students who were the target learners to understand the subject specialist texts in English which made it through the selection process, the colleagues wrote online comprehension activities to reinforce vocabulary, new phrases and the targeted subject knowledge. Naturally, these exercises also assisted in the overall development of the learners’ academic and subject specialist reading skills. One example of a list of reinforcement questions is presented below, from a unit on resume writing and applying for a job:

1. How is the word 'signal' used in the text and what other uses does it have in English?
2. Explain the use of 'assignment' in the expression 'international assignment'. How else is the term assignment understood in English?
3. What is meant by the term 'posting' in the text? What other meanings do the words post/posting have in English?
4. What other English words can one use for the term 'search engine'?
5. What is an employment office? What happens in such an office?
6. List as many meanings for the terms 'classified / classifieds' as possible.
7. State the contexts in which the term 'target' may be used, demonstrating its various meanings in English.
8. What is another word in English for resume?
9. What is the difference meant in the text between the terms 'employer' and recruiter'?
10. What are some English synonyms for the term 'help-wanted section'?
11. Besides 'brochures', what other English words are there for paper-type forms of advertisement?
12. Give synonyms for 'publish'.
13. What is the opposite of the word 'temporary'?

Additional online activities ranged from exercises demanding that students employ reading comprehension strategies, in order to fill in the blanks in a text, whether with single words or short groups of words, often from a given list of choices, to multiple choice, to short answer exercises. In designing the total of ten units, we were careful to design each unit on the basis of a unit plan, which gave students a template they could get used to and expect, as they progressed through the web materials. Color schemes, layout, design, order to information, texts, exercises and listening elements were repeated for each unit.

Each instructor assigned with a unit was given instruction by an expert in IT course design at the university in the use of web-based learning tools. Zaharias & Poylymenakou (2009) have written about how methods of e-learning may be evaluated, and our instructor introduced us to these, as well. Moreover, the expert was also an experienced language instructor, so he possessed the requisite expertise, not only through his own research in L2 acquisition, but from his classroom

experience, which he then brought to our workshops, to assist us in creating our own online activities. These activities included:

- Multiple choice creation software applications, such as *HotPotato*
- True/false applications, such as *HotPotato* and *exe*
- Drag & drop matching exercise applications (which we decided not to put into the final units)
- CLOZE type exercise applications, such as *HotPotato* and *exe*
- Listening comprehension vocabulary exercises using *exe*

An example of a CLOZE activity which was considered for final inclusion can be seen below:



Reading activity 1: Cloze Activity

Read the paragraph below and fill in the missing words.

The European Mobility Week (EMW) is a European-wide campaign dedicated to sustainable which takes place every from 16 to 22 September. It aims to influence urban mobility and transport in the long-term and is the largest initiative of its kind in the . Thousands of towns and in Europe participate annually in EMW, and the initiative is attracting participants from further afield, notably from Brazil, Canada, Japan, Norway and Taiwan. Last year, 2,158 local participated, supported by coordinators working at national level, a European-level consortium and the European Commission (DG Environment).

Each year the European Mobility Week has a different . In 2012, the focal theme was ‘Moving in the right direction’ which emphasized the importance of sustainable urban mobility and the attention that needs to be given to involving in the design of public transport and mobility planning. The theme reflected the important role that local authorities and their partners on the ground have to play in engaging citizens when upgrading their ’s mobility network and in generating a substantial behavioral in favor of sustainable transport modes.

cities	change	mobility
world	citizens	year
city	theme	authorities
plans	bicycles	laws

Vocabulary exercises were introduced in many forms, one of which may be seen below:

Vocabulary exercises



Learn to recognize synonyms:

to enable	to participate	to adapt	to improve	to develop
to promote	to register	to select	to provide	to recognize
to encourage	to award	to apply	to offer	to inform

EXERCISE:

Replace the words in **RED** with one of the verbs above:

1. John **signed up for** the course.
2. Zsófi **is trying to get** a place in the program.
3. The university **is giving** the student the money she needs to go abroad.
4. ERASMUS **is trying to improve** international relations among students.
5. The scholarship **makes it possible for** even poor students to go abroad.
6. Host universities **must accept officially** the students' foreign program.
7. The 1st place winner **was given** a trophy.
8. The dog owner **was told about** the accident.
9. ERASMUS **strengthens the resolve of** students to go abroad.
10. Students hope **to better be able to** speak English while abroad.
11. The exchange program **gives** 10 students per semester the opportunity to go abroad.
12. Only full-time students **can take part in** the program.
13. Culture shock is the feeling a student has **in adjusting to** differences in daily life while abroad.
14. The EU **created** the ERASMUS program to promote cohesion among Member States.
15. Students **are chosen** on the basis of their academic results.

The audio portions of the units were difficult for several reasons. On the one hand, listening to content subjects delivered in a foreign language is quite difficult for students. On the

other, copyright could not be infringed. We decided against using social media to further enhance the listening sections, even though recent research does show its uses. (Compare Rusbridger, 2010) Therefore, in the University of Debrecen project, listening skills exercises required us to learn how to cut, edit and transcribe audio tracks from video, as well as to learn how to write and record our own scripts. One free, web-based tool we used to remove the audio track from YouTube videos which were copyright free was *AnyAudio Converter*. The removed audio track had to then be converted into an mp3 format, which was then used to create online pre- and while-listening activities.

Throughout our online course design activities, our focus was on providing students with strategic competence, through which the learner might achieve a level of L2 knowledge, which would prepare him/her for active, proper and successful interaction with native speakers of L2, by further providing the learner with grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and finally discourse competence. (From Canale, 1983) The focus was to create a learning environment in which students strive to solve professional tasks in the targeted subject areas, using the most authentic linguistic communication possible. The question of authenticity is central to the five concepts which have evolved within LSP. Indeed, authenticity was the impetus for LSP exercise typology (Coffey 1984), and represents a skills-based approach to materials development and design in such courses.

This authenticity was tested in three ways:

1. The members of the business community who had provided inputs on what subjects should be included in the course materials were consulted, after reviewing the materials
2. Tests were conducted on the materials, including outside peer reviews
3. The course units were piloted in free classes for students at the university who needed to pass their intermediate state language examinations in an area of ESP of their choice (marketing and trade, tourism and hospitality, finance and accounting, agriculture).

The outcomes of each of these three processes are presently being considered and decisions will be made on which elements of the designed materials need revision, what elements still require reinforcement and how the units assisted or did not assist students in preparation for their state accredited language examinations in ESP of their choice, as listed above.

Conclusion

The University of Debrecen has recently completed a multi-year project towards introducing online courses for students taking ESP across the curriculum. The University of Debrecen integrates foreign language teaching into the degree programs, and its main mission is to prepare students for the relevant state language examination as well as for the requirements of the international labor market. In doing so, instructors required complete retraining in course and syllabus design, as well as the use of IT and web-based educational software and applications, how to incorporate learning objectives into targeted educational tools, and how to combine these new materials with classroom reinforcement, in order to assure effective learning. The project has now been piloted and the results and feedback therefrom will lead to materials revisions and new aspects being developed, towards the improvement of ESP online facilitated courses.

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