Original Contribution

EFFECTIVE WAYS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING WITH THE COGNITIVE APPROACH

M. Pavlova*

Faculty of Education, Trakia University, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria

ABSTRACT
There are several issues to give thought to when selecting web sites and multimedia materials for students acquiring a foreign language. Learners should be able to link to multimedia glossaries or other supports that connect new information to background knowledge. They should be given opportunities to actively engage with the foreign language (create multimedia glossaries, write on topics they have chosen, check their knowledge in specific fields online self-check tests) rather than passively receive information through drill and practice.

Key words: multimedia materials, cognitive approach, language acquisition

INTRODUCTION

To support students' acquisition of a foreign language, researchers have identified two instructional approaches. First, proponents of the structural approach argue that drill and practice is the best way to learn grammar and vocabulary. With this approach, language is usually taught orally with an emphasis on the learner responding to spoken prompts. Second, the cognitive approach emphasizes how the learner interacts with language. An effort is made to make language acquisition a more active process. In this process the background knowledge and skills are integrated with the new content and this way language personality is enriched and active learning is realized. Active learning is rendered through specific actions with the language content and that is learning by doing. Here online resource materials can be of great support and use as they directly involve students interaction with language. Instruction is based on activating prior knowledge and allowing the learner to build the cognitive skills

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Correspondence to: *Mariana Pavlova,*
Faculty of Education, Trakia University, Stara Zagora; e-mail: pavlova@pf.uni-sz.bg

required to understand, process, and interact with a language. The research on cognitive approach to learning in a digital multimedia environment is relatively small and often limited to studies that include college students; however, the insights from this work can be helpful for elementary and secondary educators.

The article is comprised of an overview of the stages for effective instruction using the cognitive approach to acquiring a foreign language, a section providing advice for choosing sites to support this approach, and a list of these resource sites.

Overview of using multimedia to support a cognitive approach to foreign language acquisition

Input: Students need accessible materials
In the first stage of the cognitive approach for foreign language acquisition, comprehensible input, the underlying assumption is that the learner needs help identifying the critical features in "the wealth of the linguistic and nonlinguistic information they receive" (1). This means that the materials used in a multimedia instructional approach should guide what

students notice in a word, sentence, passage, or image. This strategy can also be accomplished through immediate and focused educator feedback. For example, "when an educator highlights portions of an assignment that require revisions, the student's ability to evaluate and revise their work increases" (2) .These strategies help the learner understand task directions and focus on pertinent information to comprehend or revise.

Another strategy for increasing the accessibility of materials is using a multimedia glossary for problematic vocabulary. This can be helpful for interdisciplinary benefits as it is related not only to language itself, but to other subjects as well. When students have access to images, sentences, and pronunciations for vocabulary terms, their comprehension of the content increases. There are lots of examples of multimedia glossaries, thesauruses, slang dictionaries (which are of particular interest to students) and topic-related sites found on the Internet. And here the role of the educator is to guide the students and provide them with relevant information.

Interaction: Students need proper planning to process information
The second stage of the cognitive approach includes information links that provide simplification, elaboration, clarification, definitional support, or redundancy. Similar to highlighting important information, educators can outline student comprehension of content-area facts, concepts, and generalizations and the links between them. When considering how students might interact with new content, it is important to ensure that new information be linked to previous learning. Topic-related sites are effective ways to facilitate this task because they can provide an overview of a specific topic and represent links between the content to be learned.

Students' interactions with content can also be more effective when they have "control over the mode of presentation" (3). In a digital environment, for example, some students might prefer hearing text read aloud whereas others might prefer reading it on their own. If reading fluency is not the objective of a lesson, it is important to allow students to make these types of decisions. The educator's best judgment is required, however, when deciding what supports are appropriate for the learner.

Output: Students need to be engaged in active learning
The third stage, the comprehensible output, is defined as "the need for use of language in meaningful contexts to develop the learners' communicative competency"(4). Effective means to support students during this stage is self-correction. A very useful tool for this are self-assessment tests.

Research on foreign language acquisition also indicates a need for educators to focus on both students' academic and affective learning. To do so, educators need to be aware of the potential discontinuities between learning at home and learning at school. To address this disconnect between home and school, many educators have found success bringing "sociocultural (and personal) elements into the classroom curriculum and instruction" (5) by allowing students to select topics for writing assignments . The educator can also create shared experiences for the entire class through virtual field trips or other cooperative activities through a digital multimedia environment.

CONCLUSION
Choosing Relevant Materials
There are several issues to give thought to when selecting web sites and multimedia materials for students acquiring a foreign language. First, when considering plans and supports, learners should be able to link to multimedia glossaries or other supports that connect new information to background knowledge. Second, learner control is important. Materials should allow the learner to manage the path and pace of learning. If the student needs more background information for a concept or a definition of a key vocabulary word, there should be offered links to this information throughout the learning process. Finally, students should be given opportunities to actively engage with the foreign language (e.g. create multimedia glossaries, write on topics they have chosen, check their progress through online self-assessment tests) rather than passively receive information through drill and practice.

Resources

A huge online dictionary containing specific terms from different fields, encyclopedia and various language games: http://www.thefreedictionary.com/

Multimedia Glossary - Mathematics provides links to mathematics vocabulary, including animations that demonstrate these concepts. Concepts are organized alphabetically and by grade level: http://www.harcourtschool.com/glossary/math_advantage/glossary1.html

Multimedia Glossary - Science includes a glossary of science terms organized alphabetically and by grade level: http://www.harcourtschool.com/glossary/science/intro.html

Topic-related sites and self-assessment quizzes focusing on Business English: http://www.businessenglishsite.com/ and http://www.letterwritingguide.com/

A dictionary containing colloquial and slang expressions: http://www.urbandictionary.com/

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