

BUSINESS ENGLISH FOR IT STUDENTS IN THE E-LEARNING FORMAT

by Malgorzata Rzeznik

Polish-Japanese Institute of Information Technology,

Warsaw, Poland

Malgorzata.Rzeznik@pjwstk.edu.pl

and

Anna Drzewinska

Institute of Applied Linguistics,

Warsaw

Warsaw, Poland

adrzew@poczta.onet.pl

"Millions of words have been written about the technology and its potential, but not much about what the teachers and learners actually do online" (Salmon, 2000)

Abstract

In this paper, an example of using the Internet communication tools to structure the learning environment in which the foreign language teaching-learning processes take place is presented. Language learning as such is tied to verbal communication, which by definition is carried out over a distance. The challenge of using the Internet in the foreign language teaching-learning process is to harness its potential to better serve the needs of the teachers and the learners.

Introduction

The Internet is making inroads in education but there is a wide discrepancy between the hype surrounding it and the way it is used in the teaching and learning process generally and in the foreign language teaching and learning process especially.

In Poland, even though computers with Internet access are becoming more and more available at every educational level, there are too few institutions which use electronic communication tools to provide education. And there are still fewer which implement them into the foreign language teaching and learning process in a systematic and consistent way.

In this paper, an example of one such institution, Polish-Japanese Institute of Information Technology (PJWSTK), will be described. Special focus will be put on using the Internet tools to structure the learning environment in which the foreign language teaching-learning processes take place and presenting the rationale behind it. Also, the areas in which expanding the scope of using the Internet tools is considered desirable and advisable will be presented.

The foreign language learning-teaching process

The foreign language learning and teaching process, involving the learner and the teacher (but not only) takes place in a unique whole, referred to as the glottodidactic system (Grucza, 1976, 1978), the focal point of which is the language learner.

The language learning and teaching process is understood to be a cognitive process, based on verbal communication, the mental locus of which is human information processing mechanism, specialized for processing language symbols in their special arrangements (Dakowska, 2003). The cognitive and communicative processes are mutually dependent. Language learning as a cognitive process can only take place through verbal communication and each act of verbal communication always has cognitive results. Verbal communication is a form of human behaviour, instantiated by interaction with the environment. The interaction of the learner with the environment is defined by the nature of verbal communication and the learner's information processing equipment, specialized for language.

By its very nature, communication is something which can take place between (at least two) different centres (Grucza 1992: 15). Thus, the setting of a communication exchange is a moment at a cross-section of space and time (situation), being itself an instantiation of a particular communication domain, together with the participants of the communication exchange in their particular roles, with their aims, emotions, etc.

As any verbal communication exchange is carried over a distance, no matter how long or short, by definition it implies an active role of not only the sender, but also of the receiver. In the teaching-learning situation, the teacher does not have the power to control the mental environment of the learner and will not replace the learner in his/her effort to process the information received. However, knowledge of the way human information processing mechanism works can help the teacher make appropriate choices regarding the creation of suitable conditions in which the teaching-learning processes take place by providing plenty of meaningful and structured input in the form of primary language data, i.e. discourse, and organizing the learner's experience and practice in the form of tasks.

E-learning format

With the above written in mind, what has to be established is a comprehensive yet concise definition of e-learning. Many labels have been affixed to using the Internet in education, the

most frequently used being 'distance' (e.g., Doughty, Long, 2003; Kedrova, 2000; Olechowska, 2002; Sampson, 2003); 'online' (e.g., Mason, 1998; Swaffar, Romano, Markley, Arens (ed.), 1998; Salmon, 2003), 'network-based' (e.g., Warschauer, Kern (ed.), 2000), and 'web-based' (e.g., Mioduser, Nachmias, Lahav, Oren, 2000), combined with either teaching or learning.

In *distance learning* what is usually stressed is the distance between the teacher and the learner regardless of the technologies deployed for the purposes of the course.

The implied feature of the so-called *online courses* is that the learner has unlimited and constant access to materials available on the course servers and, in some cases, instructors.

Warschauer and Kern give the following definition of *network-based language teaching* (NBLT): "NBLT is language teaching that involves the use of computers connected to one another in either local or global networks" (<http://www.gse.uci.edu/markw/nblt-intro.html>).

Web-based teaching is understood as using existing websites as sources of course materials, and Internet technologies as tools supporting teacher-learner, learner-learner, and learner-content communication.

Their common feature is the fact that the Internet (and computers generally) *are* used in the teaching and learning process. Computers have been referred to as 'cognitive tools' (Wolff, 1999), which does not necessarily mean that they can think, but that they can be considered as a tool in human cognitive functioning. What is important, however, is not only the computers (i.e. the hardware), but also the technologies and their features (i.e. the software), which can be adapted to the needs of the teachers and learners.

Doughty and Long (2003: 15) rightly point that "there is a clear distinction between classroom-connected uses of technology (e.g., CALL) and distance learning". While classroom-connected use of technology is usually just one of the many possible options in the teaching-learning process, in the case of distance learning it is thanks to the technology that the teaching-learning process can take place, as the teacher is "removed in space and time from the learners, who may, in turn, be removed from one another" (Doughty, Long 2003: 53).

What seems then to be important are the issues of time and place. In this respect Kubiak (2000: 27) suggests the following differentiation:

- same time, same place;
- same time, different places;
- different times, same place;
- different times, different places (translation of the author, AD).

When the teacher and the learners are distributed in space and/or time, what comes into play are also the technologies and tools allowing for the establishing and maintaining contact. The available options are synchronous (e.g., chat, audio/video conferencing) and asynchronous (e.g., e-mail, www, bulletin boards, newsgroups, discussion forums) communication tools. The way they are combined and used in the teaching-learning process may have far-reaching consequences for the subsequent attainments of the learner, i.e. the level of his/her language proficiency.

The tools and technologies not only allow for the reconstruction and extension of the so-far-known learning environment into the electronic space, but also for making the most of the available technical options to create a new – virtual - learning environment (e.g., Britain, Liber, 1999). Such an environment would not only facilitate communication but also host multimodal content as well as tests and other activities for the provision of immediate feedback both to the learner and the course tutor.

The spectrum of possible ways to create such an environment is very wide, and ranges from simple tools, such as e-mail and www, to advanced ones, such as portals, platforms, and dedicated systems, i.e. LMS (Learning Management System), CMS (Content/Class Management System) or LCSM (Learning Content Management System) (Chmielewski, 2002).

A portal is a piece of software, the aim of which is to provide "the entrance site to the Internet as well as different services" (Czajkowski, 1999: 313, translation of the author, AD). In the educational context, however, the system should also meet many different requirements of its groups of users, i.e. learners, teachers, and administration (Galwas, 2000), for example it should provide the opportunity for online testing, online registration and verification of students' marks, automated allocation of students to groups at different level, etc

A platform is a dedicated piece of software which integrates different Internet communication tools to (re)create a learning environment in the electronic space. Currently, there are many such platforms available on the market, which are constantly developed and upgraded, eg. WebCT, Blackboard, etc.

All the technical means are necessary, but should not blur the fact that the most important issue in the teaching and learning process is to facilitate learning, i.e. to support learners and to intensify and enhance language learning processes.

Foreign language learning and teaching online

The decision to go online with the process of foreign language teaching-learning is often not an easy one neither for the teachers (e.g., Lee, 2000) nor for the students (e.g., Hara, Kling, 2000).

Introducing a new tool is never without problems, but, considering the many possibilities not previously thought of, its potential should be better harnessed (e.g., Olechowska 2002: 4).

Basing the language learning process on verbal communication and examining it from the information-processing perspective does not simplify the research area, yet allows to mark some tangible points of reference. This in turn contributes to a better understanding of the multilateral relationships between the phenomena of verbal communication and the process of language learning, as well as between the teacher, the learner, the environment, and the technology.

The aim of using distance communication tools (both synchronous and asynchronous) is to (re)create a learning environment that would be psycholinguistically optimal for the learners (e.g., Dakowska 2001; Doughty, Long, 2003). The fact that the process of foreign language teaching and learning is carried out over a distance is its inherent feature, so the biggest challenge is to use distance communication tools to carefully plan and structure it (e.g., Salmon, 2003; Stanisławska, 2002: 10), to suitably configure such variables as discourse type, the state of the learner's information processing mechanism and the learner's readiness to undertake a task (Dakowska 2001: 120).

Having in mind that verbal communication is a form of behaviour, the essence of which is interaction, language learning and teaching should also be built around structured events in which the learners carry out different tasks. A task, whether online or classroom-based, is considered a unit of language learning and teaching and it has to be built in the cycle of human communicative behaviour, i.e. from intention via transformation, performance to feedback.

The example of PJWSTK

When the idea of launching Internet-based studies was first considered, there was much enthusiasm, little expertise and even less money. The new studies offered by Polish-Japanese Institute of Information Technology were to be undergraduate studies in IT leading up to the Engineer degree (equivalent to BSc in IT), delivered mainly on the Internet, with occasional visits of students to PJWSTK for laboratory classes and examination sessions combined to limit the travel and accommodation expenses. English was to be part of the curriculum because of the Polish state regulations.

At the beginning there were two basic attitudes to online language teaching among the PJWSTK staff. The first, favoured by the school authorities, held that the teachers would build an educational multimedia package with the help of students doing their engineer projects and this package would then be used for the course, and in the future, perhaps even sold to other educational institutions. Unfortunately, nobody mentioned any payment for the preparation of the materials. It is also the belief of the authors of this article that such packages are best developed by large publishing houses with adequate resources to do the research, development and thorough testing of their products.

The second attitude, held by the online studies' director, was that it is next to impossible to teach somebody a foreign language without having regular personal contact with them. Thus, the original idea was that the language course coordinator should produce a set of guidelines and requirements for the final examination and act as a consultant to students who would take some English course in the place of their residence or learn alone. Such a solution was not fair to students, as they would incur extra costs and would have to find extra time to attend language classes. This could lead to even higher than expected dropout rates and/or attempts at cheating in the final examination, not to mention the possible accusations of testing students from the material they have not been taught. Yet another issue was that of the exclusion of language teachers from new forms of courses involving modern technology, which could, in the long run, limit their employment options.

The widely held assumption that teaching a language over the Internet is hardly possible is probably based on the popular notion that learning a foreign language means learning to speak it. While this is true to some extent, it overlooks other skills and competencies necessary for the communication in the modern world – writing (including fast typing skills), the knowledge of vocabulary and structures, reading and listening. It goes without saying that these can be taught using the Internet, perhaps even more effectively than in the traditional way (e-mail communication and chats being the natural environments for practising reading and writing, for example).

Finally, it was decided that the English course at the Internet-based undergraduate studies would be launched as a regular course with a syllabus, assignments and regular checks just as the other courses of the curriculum, but within more limited financial resources. The course coordinator filed a grant application to acquire some funding for building a proper teacher resource centre with adequate literature and for sponsoring expertise building activities, like participation in conferences and workshops on e-learning.

The course was planned according to the regular principles of methodology, which means the following three factors had to be considered:

1. learners: their characteristics, needs, learning experience and language proficiency;
2. available resources: both commercial (including cost-analysis of different options) and cost-free;
3. available technology: how the opportunities it offers translate into methodologically sound tools and what are its limitations from the point of view of the teacher and the learners connecting from their homes.

These elements are now going to be considered in turn.

Learners

Since the course was being planned before candidates started enrolling, some assumptions had to be made basing on the information from enquiries and the coordinator's previous experience from work with evening students of PJWSTK. The basic assumptions were:

- the students would vary as to their level of language competence and they would not be very numerous (a small mixed-ability group),
- the students would vary as to their background, age, work experience and place of residence,
- most students would be working professionals with limited time for studying (otherwise they would have entered full-time stationary education),
- all students would have had some previous experience with language learning, they had acquired certain preferences concerning the teacher's style of instruction, they had some preferred style of learning and they were aware (sometimes to the point of resignation) of their weaknesses,
- for the vast majority of full-time day students and all part-time evening students of PJWSTK the optimal course so far had been a course in Business English with the elements of IT English and some General English. This recipe has been confirmed as correct by a number of graduates who are in constant touch with their former tutors and provide useful feedback.

It must be added that the above list agrees with the description of adult learners by Malcolm Knowles (Knowles, 1984). He identified two characteristic features of such learners:

- they have a lot of experience which can be used to foster learning,
- they have predefined educational goals which must be addressed.

A course in Business English with the elements of IT English seemed an ideal option, as it was relevant to the students' needs to communicate in the workplace and it could be offered to a mixed ability group, from low intermediate (the lowest level now entering higher education) through regular intermediate to advanced. Since Business Communication Skills, such as negotiations, socialising, correspondence etc, are hardly taught at secondary schools, and Business- or IT-related vocabulary is also new, every course participant will find such a course challenging and/or interesting enough to be motivated. Of course, the language level of the course could not be too high and intermediate seemed an appropriate choice.

Resources

The next issue to address was that of proper course materials. The first to be considered were commercial multimedia packages which could be either given to students, or preferably made available to students on the Edu server, just as the other courses. From different options, there emerged only one methodologically sound candidate and that was *Market Leader Online* from Pearson Education – an online course, based on the already proven paper-based course, *Market Leader Intermediate*. The original course had been used successfully with undergraduate and graduate students so at least the course content was not to be new. What *was* new was the form of delivery, while the unknown was the price of this new product. When it was officially announced it turned out that a 9-month login for one student came at 4 times the price of a full paper-based package (Course Book, Practice File and CD), which would be sufficient for the full

two-year course. The organisers could either ask the students to pay for their logins or get the school to pay. Neither option was feasible.

Finally it was decided to follow a well-established and tested path of paper-based distance education, albeit with the use of modern technology to foster communication between students and their teacher and students among themselves. This path meant that experimenting on people was kept to a minimum and the students would not bear any unnecessary costs. The course material from Course Book was broken into 4 terms and 15 weekly assignments in each term. The students were given a syllabus of the first semester with the information which of the tasks were to be sent back as homework for the teacher to check, which tasks were to be realised as online forum discussions, when the online tests were scheduled. At the end of the term there was a face-to-face meeting, the purpose of which was to discuss the material covered and check whether the students have mastered it.

Technology

As far as the technological solutions available for the course are concerned, the most important here is the Class Management System, called the Edu PJWSTK platform, developed especially for Internet studies by the students and database lecturers of PJWSTK. This system allows:

- posting announcements, sending e-mail to selected or all students,
- asynchronous discussion (forum),
- synchronous discussion (chat) – this facility was added in the second term so the course started without the chat option,
- uploading files onto the server by the teacher and the students,
- downloading files from the server,
- adding links to useful web pages,
- running online tests,
- storing students' grades,
- checking traffic (this lets the instructor identify 'lurkers' – students who visit the site but do not participate in group activities).

The first and foremost feature of the Edu PJWSTK platform was its ease of use, even for an inexperienced person (ergonomic design, clear icons, non-flashy colours). (for information about Edu PJWSTK go to http://www.int.pjwstk.edu.pl/edu_pl.html)

The second, more ELT-oriented, software used in the course was Hot Potatoes (<http://www.hotpotatoes.net>). This authoring package helps the teacher create his or her own exercises in a variety of formats – crossword, multiple-choice, gap-filling, etc. The exercises thus created are converted into the html format and can be used on any web browser. Since most material was paper-based and most work done individually by students, the possibility to add some tailored vocabulary and grammar practice was very welcome.

Additionally, some language-related web pages were used as well as information services and pages related to the IT subject-matter. (see eg: <http://www.englishpage.com>)

To sum up the planning process, students were supposed to do the following:

- send answers to selected tasks via e-mail or upload them on the server,

- participate in asynchronous discussions,
- do the online tests,
- read selected articles related to IT by following the links which appeared on the Edu (that was usually followed by summary writing and an online discussion) – the articles were always up-to-date from the most recent issues of Newsweek, Time or Scientific American,
- do the selected exercises from web pages (<http://www.englishpage.com/>; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/index.shtml>),
- do additional grammar and vocabulary exercises created by the teacher using Hot Potatoes.

The teacher's role was to:

- check students' homework and indicate any areas requiring more work,
- encourage and monitor asynchronous discussions,
- browse the Internet in search of proper and up-to-date articles,
- write grammar notes explaining more difficult issues,
- design additional exercises using Hot Potatoes,
- write and check online tests (some tests were checked automatically),
- prepare final written and oral test,
- answer any queries the students might have.

The course started and went surprisingly well. The students kept sending their home assignments quite regularly, although there were a few dropouts. The additional materials were popular (also with day students with whom Edu PJWSTK was used as a CMS), tests got solved. However, some problems started emerging:

1. the students seemed resistant to participate in forum discussions,
2. some students were obviously communicating informally concerning homework and tests – the answers received by the teacher were far too similar.

Since the above issues are quite serious, they needed to be considered.

On the basis of the experience gained so far, the authors can venture to say that the problem with asynchronous discussions might stem from a combination of two factors:

1. Students of the first semester generally do not know one another and their group must go through a 'forming' stage – the first stage in the group evolution cycle of forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning (Tuckman, 1977). Since the students come from a variety of locations and backgrounds, this will take longer than in the case of the usual two-to-three-week period of a regular full-time stationary group. Gilly Salmon who wrote a lot on the need to foster group-building activities also stressed that this must first of all take time. (Salmon, 2000) For the e-courses held at PJWSTK, it seems that the forming occurs during the whole first semester, with some storming and norming near the end, when the students start negotiating who will help whom with the tasks outstanding. That was repeated in the case of the second course despite all the ice-breaking activities introduced as part of most first-term subject courses and despite the

efforts of individual students to consolidate the group (it seems even the informal students' forums collapse). It could be different for different subjects and different participants, but one has to remember that the students of PJWSTK enrol for a 4-year undergraduate study so they have quite a long time perspective. However, anyone who witnessed the slow speed at which online discussions progress, which are educational (not fun) chats, will realize that it must take longer than normally for a group to consolidate. It will take even longer if discussions are asynchronous.

2. As far as asynchronous discussions are concerned, they do not provide participants with immediate rewards for posting their contributions. When the chatroom was introduced to Edu PJWSTK in the second semester of the first course, the students participated eagerly. The same happened with the second edition of studies for whom the chat facility was available since the beginning. They would come online to talk to their teacher and colleagues and refuse to participate in a forum discussion. Still, the group lacked cohesion and took almost 3 months to consolidate, despite synchronicity and special attempts of tutors in all subjects to introduce more team-building activities.

'Cheating' was another serious issue, which needed some considerations. In the end, it was decided students would not be punished for communicating during test- or task-solving as long as they did not send in identical summaries of articles or identical correspondence. After all, negotiating answers means that the students have to pay more attention to the issues in question. It could even lead to better internalisation of knowledge (Mietzel, 2000). The teachers waited for the face-to-face oral test at the end of the term to see whether the communication between certain students led to good learning outcomes. When the assumption was confirmed, it still came as a bit of surprise, probably due to the lingering attitude to 'cheating'. The fact that students can and will communicate informally solving tests outside a physical classroom is a given and must be treated as another learning opportunity. However, it is still of prime importance to hold end-of-term tests in a controlled environment (the school's or proxy's premises) for objective and academically rigorous assessment (McVay, 2002).

In the second semester the chat function was added to the Edu PJWSTK platform and the lecturers were obliged to provide real-time consultation. After the first online meeting and a discussion with students, the course format changed. Nowadays it looks as follows:

- Students do most long reading and listening offline, as well as grammar and vocabulary exercises.
- They send in only longer pieces of writing and answers to additional grammar exercises (from the Macmillan's Language Practice series – the level depending on each student's needs, although this is increasingly being superseded with practice using the <http://www.englishpage.com/> – a web page with good quality exercises at many language levels).
- Shorter tasks, discussions, communication practise ('speaking' tasks), fast reading exercises are done in real-time during online meetings (the teacher being preferably a

facilitator rather than a participant). This means less time spent correcting homework for teacher and more quality communication time for students.

- Students do online tests.
- Students come for the end-of-term face-to-face oral test (written tests are provided for those students who could not participate in the course systematically and have not met normal pass requirements).

As can be observed from the above description – the course which has emerged in the process of evolution has nothing to do with the classical ideal of network-based learning available any time to anyone from any place, with the participant being able to pick and choose what they want/need to learn. In fact, the courses verging on the ideal thus described have collapsed bringing about a lot of unnecessary disappointment and huge financial losses. Since the Internet and related technological solutions were built for communication, and language learning is basically done to improve people's communication skills, it is only natural that we can teach and learn communication through communication over the Net – both asynchronous (e-mail, discussion forum) and synchronous (chat and in the near future group-teleconferencing). It agrees with McVay's idea of 'learning cohorts' – groups assembling for the purpose of completing a specific course over the Internet within a predefined time and with a human tutor closely monitoring the progress. (McVay, 2002)

Is there is still room for 'knowledge repositories' available at any time to anyone connecting from any place? Certainly – explanatory notes, dictionaries, vocabulary and grammar drills are vital elements of language learning over any medium in any form, and the fact that nowadays most of them are available as automated computer applications means they are easier to use and they can be done at one's leisure freeing the online and classroom time for less structured (and more demanding) communication practice.

One must also note that chat is not always feasible as a method of teaching. It is quite time consuming and could be costly for participants if they use a classical modem connection. The same would apply to the attempts at practising speaking (there are some programs which allow the exchange of audio messages). If the problems is serious, perhaps communication should be limited to the exchange e-mail correspondence and participation in asynchronous forum discussions.

Suggestions for online tutors and course managers

The article has discussed the planning, launching and evolution of an Internet-based language course which is still running and whose participants are making noticeable progress. Finally, some tips for those who want to engage themselves in similar programmes are provided:

- Online chat sessions must be held twice a week – on a weekday for those learners who communicate from work, at weekend for those who cannot communicate from work. The latter might collide with one's family life but is necessary (see also McVay, 2002).
- Online discussions are slower – contributions take longer to type than to say, they also take some time to arrive, especially during peak traffic times. The teacher must be careful

not to rush things. Moreover, the teacher also has to remember (and not being able to see the learners makes it more difficult) that his or her level of language proficiency is higher than that of the students, so s/he puts thoughts into words quicker.

- Even with IT students one must not assume that they have had experience with Internet chats. They may not automatically understand typical chat acronyms (eg., LOL meaning 'laughing out loud' or BTW being 'by the way'). On the other hand, the chat should be educational and that means quite formal without much 'netspeak'. The balance between the inherent informality of the medium and the formality of the teaching/learning situation must be achieved.
- There are several stress factors specific to distance teaching which have to be borne in mind – high student dropout rates (30-70% acc to McVay, 60-70% at PJWSTK so far), huge time demands on the teacher and lack of face-to-face contact with the learners.
- The CMS must be easy to use and technical staff running the institution's servers helpful. The servers should be operational at all times – technical problems with the Internet connection seriously disrupted language courses at PJWSTK for a month in one of the semesters and this disruption led to considerable delays in the teaching/learning process, not to mention the frustration of tutors and students.
- It is obvious that people may communicate informally if they are not supervised (ie physically watched) during an online test. Thus, online testing should be treated as a learning, rather than testing, opportunity and a more controlled environment for a final test or examination must be provided. One can also plan tasks which will eliminate 'cheating', eg ask open questions requiring a person to give his/her opinion (McVay, 2002).
- Above all – careful planning and clear structure is of paramount importance. Technology used and the course format are variables depending on the resources and preferences of the students and the teachers.

Despite some problems, e-courses in English at PJWSTK go smoothly and the students are generally more cooperative than in the case of other forms of study offered at the Institute. What is more, there is observable progress in the students' speed, quality and precision of response during online chat discussions, which indicates their improving mastery of language (and typing). The students are also able to read and understand increasingly complex texts and write increasingly complex pieces of business correspondence. It can be inferred then that online teaching and learning is possible. For the teachers, it offers the possibility of teleworking, the opportunity for professional development and the source of satisfaction from being part of an emerging educational solution still in its experimental phase, at least in Poland. For the students, it is the possibility of learning at a school or university of their choice or sometimes the only chance to get a degree (in case of a serious disability or work and family commitments).

Implications for further research

Currently, there are many projects going on at PJWSTK aiming at increasing the scope of the Internet use in the foreign language learning-teaching process. The ideas envisaged include multilingual input archives in the form of audio, video, and text-based resources; educational object repositories; a chat research tool.

It is not certain what the future will look like for Internet courses at PJWSTK and for online education in general. Certainly some technologies will become more sophisticated and widespread. Hopefully, within two or three years broadband Internet access will become much cheaper, allowing for teleconferencing solutions to be used on a regular basis, thus resolving the problems of teaching the speaking skill (this will of course come at the expense of the writing skill now prevailing) and monitoring learners during online tests.

Teleconferencing will also definitely help strengthen the teacher-learner and intra-group ties necessary for better motivation of learners as well as teachers. Cheaper, more sophisticated and more numerous multimedia packages will be available for the use on e-learning platforms. Students and teachers will have got used to new ways of communicating and computer-assisted teaching/learning, although perhaps the need for 'tangibility' will still make most of them print out 97% of materials available online (US data for 1999, McVay, 2002). Nevertheless, for all the predictions which are now being made, the distant future, which at the present rate of progress means a 10-year perspective, will not resemble anything one can imagine now.

Conclusion

The Internet communication tools have their merits and using them in the foreign language learning-teaching process is therefore justified. However, they are but one element of a much more complex issue. As it has been demonstrated, in the learning process, no matter whether online or classroom-based, what seems to be most important is using the available resources, both material and non-material (e.g., Drzewińska, 2004), to create a learning environment that would be beneficial for human information processing mechanism. As far as the Internet as such and the Internet communication tools are concerned, there is still much room for research to explore the possible options.

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Links to resources mentioned in the article

BBC Languages, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/index.shtml>

Englishpage, <http://www.englishpage.com/>

Hot Potatoes, <http://www.hotpotatoes.net/>

PJWSTK school website, <http://www.pjwstk.edu.pl>; information about e-learning:

http://www.int.pjwstk.edu.pl/edu_pl.html

