

MULTIMEDIA IN TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH

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Introduction

Nowadays, computer-based multimedia has a well-established role in the language teaching and learning process. Together with great technological development of computers, increased speed and processing power, language learning multimedia is undergoing a dramatic change, becoming more and more versatile, lifelike and elaborate. The market is flooded with language learning programs of different kinds, and one can buy them virtually anywhere, even at a relatively competitive price. However, using such software can be in many cases devoid of sound pedagogical principles, and, consequently, bring more harm than benefit. Thus, the situation of a learner can be compared to the one of a patient who takes expensive antibiotics, without the doctor's supervision, strongly believes in the success of the process, but actually can use the medicine effectively only once.

The present paper is going to deal with the issue of using different kinds of language learning multimedia programs in the process of teaching Business English. The emphasis here will be on the role of the teacher in using programs, and the present author will attempt to show how electronic dictionaries, coursebook-related programs, skill-specific programs and full language courses can be used in the teaching process. To make the discussion even more practical, the paper will consist of examples of computer-based activities referring to a specific Business English coursebook, *Marketleader Intermediate*.

Computers in the teaching and learning process

Before moving on to specific applications of computer technology in the learning process, one should consider the view of modern educational technology in general. To start with, there are the following dimensions of the use of computers in language learning:

- Computer-Assisted Instruction, where the machine is used as a teaching tool, presenting subsequent pieces of material, storing and effectively combining multimedia data;

- Computer-Managed Instruction, where the main purpose of using the computer is to store, deliver instruction, create, execute and check students' tests;
- Computer-Mediated Communication, in which computer technology helps learners engage in meaningful communication with the use of email, video- and audioconferencing, chat, ICQ;
- Computer-Adaptive Testing, which is characterized by the computer running the testing process "in the real time" and adapting the test to the testee's level, selecting more difficult or easier questions from a test bank depending on the testee's answers;
- Computer-Based Multimedia, where the use of the computer, its multimedia capabilities plus enormous storage capacity, make it possible to enhance the content with the use of picture, video and sound together with the text.

The multimedia programs analysed in this paper will mainly fall into Computer-Assisted, Computer-Managed Instruction and Computer-Based Multimedia categories, of course, to a different degree.

When considering the advantages the computer brings to the learning process, one can mention, above all, the following:

- fast access to words, sentences and files;
- hypertextuality enabling effective combination of different elements and non-linear access;
- advanced searching possibilities, especially useful in case of electronic dictionaries;
- storing huge amounts of multimedia data in a convenient format;
- user identification procedures, enabling various learners to use the same copy of the program;
- automatic test giving, test taking and test checking, making it possible for learners to use the content on their own, without the need for the teacher;
- progress tracking and report generating facilities, thanks to which the teacher can monitor a student's activities in the program;
- elaborate user support systems, in the form of an interactive guided tour, a help file, a FAQ page or a dedicated website.

From the point of view of the teacher, one could add here giving fast and competent language information, covering various aspects of use; enabling lesson preparation by providing vocabulary, texts or recordings for classroom use; equipping the teacher with multimedia means for varied vocabulary presentation; eliciting language instruction by providing contexts, models, situations.

Language learning software in the classroom – general remarks

It is a frequent misconception that for a language teacher to implement multimedia in a language course, they need to have a fully equipped computer lab at their disposal, with the number of workstations equaling the number of students, all state-of-the-art, with the newest software installed. This ideal situation, fairly infrequent in underresourced Polish schools (and perhaps also in many other countries of the world), does not have to bring expected profits in teaching terms, for a computer-student interaction only would change the classroom from a social gathering into an individual study place. On the contrary, depending on the resources available, a creative language teacher can effectively exploit the potential of multimedia software in the following modes:

- a lesson in a computer lab, one computer per a pair of students;
- a lesson in a computer lab, one computer per a group of students;
- a lesson in an ordinary classroom, a teacher computer and a display device (an LCD projector or a TV set);
- a lesson in an ordinary classroom, a teacher computer and a sound system;
- a lesson in an ordinary classroom, printouts of activities/texts for students;
- multimedia software used in preparation for lessons.

The above modes of work in a computer-assisted classroom should be, on the one hand, suited to the logistics of the classroom, on the other naturally give way to the nature of the task executed. Thus, in many contexts, especially involving listening comprehension, preparation for speaking and pronunciation work, a teacher computer and a soundsystem might be sufficient to introduce the multimedia element in a language lesson. Therefore, what seems important to keep in mind is that a creative and conscious language teacher could use many of the available modes of work, to suit the situation and conform to the needs of the class, and it is not a must to provide the most prototypical whole-class individual student-computer work only.

Finally, one has to consider the relation between different types of computer software enumerated above and the coursebook teaching. What can be noticed is that some programs are most flexible, enabling easy and smooth adaptation to the relevant coursebook units. Such an example is an electronic dictionary, which is a purely utility program, used by the teacher to prepare vocabulary tasks for the lesson, provide examples for the contextualization of structures, giving students practice in resourcing. Similarly, coursebook-related programs (such as *Marketleader Interactive*), which are created on the basis and as continuation of a given coursebook (here *Marketleader Intermediate*), are fully compatible with the coursebook, and the teacher may use either the program or the coursebook to teach a particular point, enliven the lesson with a multimedia dimension or provide self-study vocabulary or grammar tasks.

On the other hand, skill-specific programs (such as *Talking Business*), follow a distinct syllabus, usually divided according to thematic modules developing certain aspects of a given skill. Such programs can be used alongside the coursebook, provided the program content is carefully scrutinized and suited to the respective coursebook units.

The final type of language learning software to be discussed here is full language courses (e.g., *Longman English Interactive*). Fully developed courses, just like coursebooks, have clearly defined principles of selecting, ordering and grading content. Therefore, it is essential to follow

such courses linearly, as otherwise the author's intentions about introducing, practicing and reinforcing material are more than likely to be distorted. For these reasons, it might be difficult, if not impossible, to use the coursebook and a program of this kind, as the aim of the program is to constitute the basic source of materials for the course.

At this point, some space needs to be devoted to the evaluation of how effective computer software can be at developing language skills. It is beyond doubt that the computer is at its best when providing listening and reading tasks, due to the inclusion of multimedia input facilitating comprehension (video, pictures and text), on-demand user support systems (looking up words hyperlinked to a dictionary or listening with a tapescript) and self-study comprehension tasks. Equally, one can exploit the power of interactive multimedia when learning vocabulary and grammar in its presentation phase (owing to multimedia formats of the presentation of information) and testing phase by giving varied practice in a multitude of activity formats.

On the other hand, one could be somewhat critical towards developing speaking skills only in human-computer interaction. The example of such a speaking task can be the format from *Talking Business*, where learners listen to the whole dialogue, then listen sentence-by-sentence, repeat and record sentences, then play the whole dialogue back and compare it with a model dialogue. This can be regarded as highly artificial and might be despised by many teachers and learners. Therefore, it seems necessary to use the software in the two modes: in the self-study mode, to practice testing listening and reading comprehension, checking the knowledge of lexis and the use of grammar, and the teacher-whole class mode, developing speaking and writing, with teachers using the elements of the program as a source of models, contexts, stimulus for speaking or writing.

Electronic dictionaries in a Business English classroom

Electronic dictionaries, unlike paper ones, undergo the process of transformation into more versatile tools, becoming a combination of a variety of components. Thus, a sample electronic dictionary, *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (LDOCE 4), has an A-Z dictionary, a thematic dictionary (Activator), a thesaurus, a collocations component, a corpus of examples, both dictionary and newspaper/book ones with a concordancer, a compendium of cultural knowledge, an exercise bank with a testing facility, information about word origin, a collection of labelled pictures, and pronunciation practice software. All these components are successfully combined and activated whenever a wanted word is enquired. Non-linear and multiple access to the dictionary data is enabled and the learner is provided with the chance to retrieve different kinds of information on demand.

What is characteristic about CD-ROM dictionaries is providing fast access to words in hyperlinked word entries. Another important issue is advanced searching capabilities (searching with and/or/not operators, specifying frequency for written or spoken words, style, part of speech), which is not only word search, but also multimedia search (looking for pictures or sound effects), subject search (words relating to a given topic), word origin search or pronunciation search. Multimedia formats for vocabulary storage, storing huge amounts of data,

enormous amounts of examples, both dictionary and corpus ones, interactive pronunciation practice and automatic feedback are other useful features.

The information included in the entry is composed of a word, its category, its usage information (written or spoken, top 1,000, 2,000 or 3,000 words); an icon to play pronunciation; a word origin button (to give information on the etymology of the word), a word set button, pronunciation, grammatical information, signposted meanings, the definition, examples, pictures, synonyms or related words, phrases a given word appears in. Another component of LDOCE 4 dictionary may be the phrase bank window, which contains phrases with the given word from other entries and words commonly used with the word (prepositions, adjectives, nouns and verbs), while the examples bank window has extra dictionary examples, taken from a corpus, 80,000 example sentences from other Longman dictionaries and over 1 million additional sentences from Longman Corpus Network. Finally, the "Activate your language" box features a link to the Activator component of the dictionary and contains specific grammatical information about the words frequently misused or very similar, with examples and definitions for comparison.

Using the dictionary in the language classroom might involve practicing the pronunciation by recording; using pronunciation search to find a word by sounds, rather than spelling; doing exam preparation in self-study exam exercises; using subject search to come up with the words in a selected subject area. When preparing for a lesson, the teacher might print different components of the dictionary (a single entry or a list of words) to present the use of some words or copy and paste to a word-processor to create vocabulary worksheets.

To give an example of how to use an electronic dictionary in a specific classroom context, one can consider a sample unit, Unit 1 "Globalisation" from a coursebook *Marketleader Intermediate*. For "Starting up" activity, the teacher can use the 'subject search' feature of the dictionary to prepare more vocabulary on companies to give students additional lexical input for speaking. When dealing with new vocabulary for a listening activity, the use of dictionary examples printed for classroom use may facilitate learning new words. "Phrase bank window" of the dictionary can be used to find collocates for new words from a vocabulary exercise and use them in constructing sentences of one's own. What is more, for a speaking activity it might be useful to use the thematic component of the dictionary, the Activator, to find more adjectives to express feelings and show the differences in strength of their meaning. Similarly, as continuation of "Language Review" section of the coursebook, the dictionary exercises on intensifying adjectives would help present adjectival collocations.

Coursebook-related programs in teaching Business English

Coursebook-related programs are the continuation of the tendency of publishers to add more and more different types of materials based on successful coursebooks. Programs of this kind (see, for instance, *Marketleader Interactive*), are closely integrated with a given coursebook by following exactly the same syllabus of topics, structures, lexis and functions. On that, they reinforce the material introduced in the coursebook, provide more practice in grammatical

structures or lexical items, add a multimedia dimension to the classroom and allow for additional work in a self-study mode in games, crosswords, gap-filling and drag-and-drop exercises.

Marketleader Interactive, a language learning software built up on the basis of *Marketleader Intermediate* coursebook, is a software focusing on teaching ESP vocabulary, practicing listening and reading comprehension, as well as business negotiation skills. Students' knowledge is based on real-life examples, which gives models for presenting and negotiating. Eight thematic units, of exactly the same structure and labels as the ones in the book, contain Introduction, Listening, Reading, Vocabulary, Grammar and Business Skills sections. Interactive tests, both pre-test, end-of-unit test and post-test, evaluate learners' progress during the course, while progress reports give the learner and the teacher the idea of how much has been done.

A language classroom using a coursebook-related program will get added value with additional listening and reading input in multiple tasks, both general and detailed comprehension tasks. Thanks to authentic materials and wider contexts created by multimedia content, learners are stimulated to acquire and use the language in more natural situations. This can be done in a whole-class mode with one computer, a soundsystem and/or a display device, when the teacher presents the listening comprehension materials to the whole class. Another way of using the course might be providing students with printed transcripts of recordings, then listening and completing gaps or learning the pronunciation of new words. While the computer is at its best when helping practice receptive skills, grammar and vocabulary retention, speaking and communication must be done in the classroom, while the computer software might provide models of interviews to listen to, separate structures to learn, repeat and master. This stimulus for the pre-speaking stage has the aim of encompassing students with language tools and drilling ensures automatic habit formation.

Finally, dialogues and descriptions of situations from the program serve as contexts for pair- and groupwork communication, where "Business Notes" pose authentic communicative tasks students have to cope with using the language acquired in the course of the unit.

To see the application of the program in a teaching situation, one can look at the second unit of *Marketleader Intermediate*. As a lead-in to the unit, students could listen to opinions of other people from the program to introduce them to the topic of branding, which would be then followed with additional listening comprehension tasks from the software, either done in the whole-class mode or for student self-study. Before reading a text about fashion piracy, the teacher uses the multimedia slideshow from the software to provide students with a fuller context and develop receptive skills while listening with or without reading the transcript. After having done that, students take interactive lexical exercises individually, to see how much they remember from the lesson. The entire teaching module culminates with an interactive test, summing up the whole unit and checking mainly vocabulary knowledge, as useful revision before a standard test.

Skill-specific programs

Teachers of Business English might make profit from using skill-specific programs, focusing on mastering grammar, listening comprehension or speaking skills. Such programs as *Talking Business* are not integrated with any coursebook, and follow their own syllabus, created according to the skills and subskills learners are supposed to master. Apart from giving learners the practice in a given skill, general language development can be found there as well, with some elements of vocabulary, listening and reading comprehension and pronunciation practice.

In skill-specific software, multimedia input is combined with textual input to form a coherent whole for the presentation of new language material, while interactive testing component (self-study games, crosswords, drag-and-drop tasks, recordings of one's responses and comparing them with a model) allows learners to work on one's own or under the teacher's guidance on developing language competence within a specified area. Thanks to a set of user-friendly tools, such as a pronunciation practice module, a mini-dictionary, a glossary, a grammar compendium, the learner is provided with the learning environment sufficient for the language learning process.

Talking Business follows its own clearly structured syllabus, aiming at learning different aspects of speaking, however, at the same time building on other skills and integrating the practice in various areas of language. Of course, speaking skill is given much greater prominence than others, and the syllabus of such programs is clearly subjected to passing on various elements of a skill to learners. This is evident when one looks at the table of contents of *Talking Business*, which consists of the following units: First Contact, Small Talk, Further Contact, Hospitality, Telephone Messages, Appointments, Travel Arrangements, Directions, Current Projects, Project Timing, Sales Results, Market Trends. Some of the units head more towards passing on the elements of speaking skill instruction, when learners acquire language functions and practice tasks preparing them for real-life oral interaction. On the other hand, apart from more speaking-oriented units, one can find here also units of more topical labels, which are intended to provide vocabulary input and practice of the new lexis in meaningful contexts.

On the level of a lesson, it is interesting to look at the structure of the course to see what a skill-oriented program might look like. A sample unit outline contains work on:

- language functions, in the three modes of "Listen", "Listen and Record" and "Practice";
- listening, both listening for specific information and listening for specific language;
- vocabulary;
- pronunciation;
- speaking;
- round-up of the unit in the form of a quiz.

Due to the fact that the teachers will not find here systematic language development, the use of the program is advisable for teachers whose learners have already acquired some language level, have clearly specified language needs, also as far as skills and situations they might work in are concerned. On the other hand, using such a program as a means of developing learners' linguistic competence, in order to move them to a higher level of language proficiency, might leave them with incomplete knowledge in some respects.

In order to demonstrate how a program of this kind can be used when teaching a selected course, *Marketleader Intermediate*, there are the following ideas for teaching unit 3 of the book, together with two modules of *Talking Business*:

1. Travel Arrangements:

- n listening to a dialogue and repeating sentences to practice their pronunciation
- n completing dialogues with words practiced
- n after having listened to a dialogue about flight reservation, learners using the flight information extracted from the listening extract to create their own dialogues
- n after having listened to an interview from the program, students adding more questions to the survey on the hotel service which is filled when checking out, and later performing it in pairs.

2. Directions:

- n listening to a dialogue from the program to reinforce the knowledge of structures used when asking for and giving directions,
- n extracting relevant phrases for their later use
- n using the sentences from the pronunciation exercise to reorder them into a dialogue
- n acting out a roleplay of a tourist and a local person asking for and giving information, being modeled by a dialogue.

Fully developed language learning courseware

The programs described above can be used in a language course either as tools in preparing and running lessons (electronic dictionaries) or sources of additional input for the development of skills (coursebook-related programs, skill-specific software). However, the teacher needs some kind of Business English curriculum with a corresponding coursebook or a set of materials that would help to realize the aims adopted in the curriculum. On the other hand, fully-developed courseware (such as *Longman English Interactive*) are complete products, offering a balanced diet of skills, grammar and vocabulary, coming in a variety of levels (in case of *LIE*, four) to ensure sufficient coverage of the material graded according to the principles adopted and distributed over all learning levels.

What is characteristic about language learning courseware is the proper balance between the module of content presentation and testing, between receptive and productive skills, oral and written. A look at the overview of *Longman English Interactive* shows that: there are fifteen units in three modules, each containing a section devoted to listening, speaking, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, reading, opening with the outline of the unit and learning objectives, while culminating with a review quiz and unit summary. The units are bound together by a device of the same characters reappearing in subsequent sections. Also, just like a coursebook, software of this type is a blend of text and multimedia (contemporary video materials, news broadcasts and animations) to enhance comprehension.

The learning process with the use of language courseware demands sufficient maturity of the user, as it is possible for the learner to cheat the tasks or fail to complete them. On the other hand, the automatic report generating facility enables both the teacher and the learner to monitor the progress, see the performance in single tasks, in different skills or areas of language. Thanks to that, planning work and diagnosing language competence is enabled. Further means of motivating learners to work is the assessment system, which is composed of an entry test (pre-test), end-of-module tests and an exit test. When taken, these evaluation instruments allow for objective assessment of learner's performance, both on-going during the course, and summative after having completed a level. Due to this, it should be possible for the learner to maintain self-discipline when learning with the course, while for the teacher and/or the parent to monitor the user's activity if necessary.

When thinking about using programs of this type in a Business English course, it must be kept in mind that they are, similarly to antibiotics, to be used instantly, in one go, with the pre-determined order of working with the material, and are most effective for the first time. A Business English teacher might find it difficult to use a Business English coursebook and a general English software, as these two will have their curricula incompatible and working with both will not have much sense. On the other hand, a general English software like *Longman English Interactive* could be quite well used by ESP teachers who do not have published ESP coursebooks for their disciplines and whose students need both general language development and specialized vocabulary and tasks. In such a case, programs of this type could be used to raise the proficiency level, and form a basis for supplementation with materials of other kinds to satisfy ESP needs.

Conclusion

As the above paper has attempted to show, there is a variety of types of educational multimedia software that could be implemented in a Business English course. Contrary to popular beliefs, language learning programs do not have to be used only by individual students, in a self-study mode, with the interaction only with the computer. There can be a variety of ways of using the programs depending on the logistics of the classroom, and a creative teacher can harness them to add value to the teaching process.

It is evident how programs described above differ in the role of the teacher they presuppose. Some, like dictionaries, play the most subservient role, and it is the teacher's creativity that puts it to play when creating language tasks. Others, such as skill-specific programs, although possessing their own syllabus, can be subordinated to the curriculum of the course, and the teacher can use them selectively in supplementing some core material. Coursebook-related programs leave less room for the teacher, by providing tasks that are compatible with the coursebook material, however, the teacher has the freedom of doing them in the most convenient mode, with the coursebook or the software. Finally, full language courses enslave the teacher to the largest degree, as it is not possible to make any modifications in the language content nor in the order of working with it, and this has to be kept in mind while deciding on using the program.

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