Project

ETALAGE. Pedagogical changes brought about by ICT integration

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In this paper, which is based on presentations delivered at the EuroCALL 2010 and EuroCALL 2011 conferences, I shall present the ETALAGE Comenius multilateral project. The acronym, ETALAGE, stands for European Task-based Activities for Language Learning; a good practice exchange (see http://www.etalageproject.eu).

As is clear from the acronym, the project is firmly founded in the tradition of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT; see Ellis, 2003) and it is European in the sense that it is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL; see Council of Europe, 2001); what is not clear from the title is that the project hopes to use ICT to further the implementation of both TBLT and the CEFRL.

It is a well-known fact that the introduction of ICT has not brought about all the pedagogical changes that many educators hoped for. In his introduction to his recent doctoral dissertation Jager gives a useful survey of authors who have come to this conclusion (Jager, 2009). In his study Jager mainly addresses the situation in higher education. I could have added several other authors, including myself, who have found that the situation in secondary and primary education presents no rosier picture.

Before going more deeply into the project, I would like to address the question of what pedagogical changes we, as educators, tried to bring about. Basically the first change that we, like many other language educators, were trying to bring about was a move from a traditional language instruction approach (grammar and vocabulary teaching) to a task-based approach. The second change that we were trying to bring about was the implementation of the CEFRL. A third change that we hoped to bring about was particularly urgent in the Netherlands; we hoped that the use of ICT would encourage (Dutch and other) teachers to abstain from using the native language and use the target language more often. It is a well-known fact that in few countries in Europe –and probably the world– teachers are more reluctant to using the target language in foreign language classes than in the Netherlands (see Van Gool, 2003). Indeed, I have witnessed many classes in which the target language was never used except in quotations.

Naive as I was, I believed that the use of new technologies would be a tool that would help these three changes to come about. Many authors have found that it is still a challenge for many foreign and second language teachers, and I should add perhaps more so to them than to teachers of many other subjects.

The introduction of ICT was addressed in a number of projects [e.g. International Modules in ICT and Language Learning (LINGUA) and European Curricula in New Technologies and Language Teaching (Comenius)], in which modules and curricula were developed, which are now delivered in several countries and in several languages.

In the first project, which ran from 1998 to 2000, the consortium consisting of five teacher training institutes in Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Spain and the Netherlands produced no fewer than 60 modules for in-service teacher training. These modules were divided into groups such as Information and Communication Technology (10 modules), Computer-Assisted Language Learning (8 modules), Audio-Visual Media (2 modules), Teaching Methodology (4 modules), Course Design and Evaluation (4 modules), Research and Thesis, and covered such diverse subjects as advanced database management, phoneme discrimination, speech recognition, Visual Basic and the exploitation of corpora. Indeed, for the ICT modules the idea was that participants would reach the level 'experienced user' after one year and 'professional user' after two years as defined in the Microsoft Professional standards. Many of these modules were highly successful and were delivered to hundreds of students in pre-service and hundreds of teachers in in-service teacher training courses. In retrospect, one may well wonder if these modules were perhaps too technology-driven and more often than not reflected the interests of the developers rather than the needs of the prospective users, language teachers, not persons needing the European Computer Driving License. Also, it had been our intention to use these modules as a basis for a master's course in New Technologies and Language Teaching (this course was in fact delivered at the University of Amsterdam, but had to be discontinued, because the enrolment was too meagre for a successful attempt at accreditation).

To remedy these problems we decided that it was urgent to give coherence to the existing modules and collect selected modules in much more modest but coherent curricula, consisting of two or three modules. The resulting project European Curricula in New Technologies and Language Teaching (ECNTLT) was highly successful in that the partners, hailing from no fewer than 12 countries (Belgium, Germany, Greece, Spain, Italy, Portugal, UK, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Lithuania, Hungary and the Netherlands), created curricula that were adapted to the local needs and were delivered in the national (very often less widely taught and spoken) languages (see http://eurolinguaict.net). Indeed the project was selected as a sample of good practice in the Comenius programme and the Greek curriculum was awarded a prize by the Greek government (European Commission, 2009).

In the following years the University of Amsterdam alone has delivered the resulting courses to no fewer than 361 teachers from literally all the countries of the European Union (without a single exception) as well as several other countries in the context of the Comenius/Grundtvig in-service training courses (http://www.amsu.edu/en/courses). Successful though these projects may have been, I wonder in how far they have come to bringing about the three changes that I described above.

My own experiences as a teacher trainer, who has very close contact with secondary schools and visits teachers –not only language teachers but also teachers in other subjects– in their classrooms several times a week, are not too positive. Where teachers of social sciences and science and mathematics teachers use presentation programmes and internet content to make their classes more attractive for the students, I hardly ever find modern language teachers using these; it is true, some teachers rely on portable cassette recorders to play recordings of native speakers (very seldom authentic) but for many even this piece of technology is too advanced. Far too many of the classes that I attended were examples of the grammar translation method (indeed, some teachers managed to turn textbooks that are based on a communicative approach into grammar translation exercises; bilingual glossaries were frequently used as sources for translation tests). In some schools work *has* started on the implementation of the CEFRL. I should add that many of the teachers I describe are persons that I tried to train myself, either in pre-service or in-service settings; all recent graduates of Dutch teacher education courses were obliged to follow such courses as my own ADDICT course, which tries to teach trainees to add ICT to their classes (as an add-on c.f. Talaas, 2005). It looks as if the exhortations to use these add-ons (let alone add-ins) have had little effect.

From these experiences I had to conclude that offering ICT and CALL modules in pre- and in-service training is not enough. In some cases we were preaching to the converted, in other cases we were giving a remedial course in basic keyboard skills, which would be forgotten soon after the course (when the persons concerned had to work with non-QWERTY keyboards). What is needed is help in actually bringing the acquired skills into the classroom.

In the context of another Comenius project, Induction and Guidance of Newly Appointed Teachers in European Schools (IGNATIUS; http://www.ignatiusproject.eu; see also Kragten e. a., 2010), we learnt the value of the tandem principle; I am not referring to e-mail tandems, so well-known in language education, but to tandems of teacher educators employed by schools and teacher educators employed by universities. We decided to apply this principle that had proved so successful in IGNATIUS, in a new project.

We were fortunate in bringing together a consortium of partners that do not only hail from highly diverse countries in Northern and Southern as well as Eastern and Western Europe (Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, the UK, Turkey and the Netherlands) but also from higher and secondary and/or primary education. Each of the eight countries was represented by a tandem of a teacher training institute (usually a university) and a training school, where the trainees of the teacher education institute were doing their placements. In this way we believed that integration of theory and practice would be given a momentous stimulus.

The present consortium therefore wished to build on the achievements of the previous two projects to address the first two challenges. We hoped to do this by collecting, re-designing, adapting and disseminating samples of good practice of ICT-based language learning tasks for the four levels of the CEFRL (A1: Breakthrough, A2: Waystage, B1: Threshold and B2: Vantage), which are most relevant for primary and secondary foreign language education and by producing in-service teacher training courses with a value of 1 European credit (ECTS) in which teachers are trained to adapt these samples to their own classroom situation.

Each partner has collected samples of good practice (learning tasks accompanied by their underlying rationale and learning materials, where possible ICT-based); the collection of samples of good practice is now made available through a multilingual website for teachers in all the languages which are represented in the project consortium (www.etalage.eu). We developed one international in-service course, to be delivered as a Comenius-Grundtvig summer course, as well as 8 courses in the national languages that have been adapted to the needs at national levels. The courses have been tried out during the project. The needs of language teachers who are speakers and/or teachers of less widely used and taught languages will also be served.

The collection of Language Learning Tasks and the development of the IS courses was conducted in close collaboration: each partner worked in a tandem of a teacher education institute and a school so that innovation (task-based approach, CEF and ICT) could have its impact on primary and secondary teachers in the schools. Moreover, the tasks were tried out in actual language learning classrooms before being delivered in the Etalage repository. Also, the tasks and the courses were reviewed by independent experts, who selected 4 tasks per tandem and made recommendations for improvement of tasks and courses. The English versions of the selected 8 x 4 = 32 tasks were then scrutinized by a native speaker of English, an English language teaching expert, to check the appropriateness of the use of English. The 32 edited English versions of the tasks were then translated into the 8 languages of the projects, so that 256 versions of the tasks are now in the repository (or will be in it very soon). The 32 English versions of the tasks are presented in table 1.

Country	Ranking	Provisional title in English	Level CEFR
DE	1	Books and Modern Media	A2 - B2
	2	Character stories	A2-B2
	3	London Sights	A2-B1
	4	I can do - My hands	A1-A2
EL	1	Schools Here and There	B1
	2	Love Through Ages	B1-B2
	3	London Zoo	A2
	4	TV Commercials	B1-B2
IT	1	Dinner invitation	A2-B1
	2	On a desert island	B1
	3	Find the treasure	A1
	4	Tourist promotion website	B1
HU	1	Introducing a City	A2
	2	Without Sound	A2
	3	Stereotypes	A2-B1
	4	How would you finish the story?	B1
NL	1	What do you want to be?	A2
	2	Sell your stuff	A1
	3	Telling people about your hobbies	A1
	4	Introduce yourself to your host family	A2
PT	1	Mapping directions	A2
	2	Create a blog to promote your city/school	A2
	3	Whodunit	A2
	4	Making a Portuguese Gastronomy TV Show	B1
UK	1	Birthday Party Invite	A1
	2	Les régions françaises	B1
	3	Les vacances	A2
	4	Visit to Paris	A1-A2
TR	1	Logbook of a century	B1-B2
	2	Create a Tourist Brochure	B1-B2
	3	Describe your room	A2
	4	Your favourite friend	A1

Table 1. The 32 learning, their ranking by independent experts and their CEFR level.

From the names of the tasks it may be clear that nearly all of them invite the learners to take part in activities that will be useful for them in every-day life, although some tasks would not be accepted as samples of task-based learning in the most orthodox sense of the word. Also, the tasks are all categorized in accordance with the Common European Framework. The question if the pedagogical changes that these tasks will – as we are convinced – bring about can be ascribed to the ICT integration remains. In order to answer this question we scrutinized the tasks with a view to their use of ICT tools. In table 2 the ICT tools found in the 32 selected learning tasks are presented.

Country	Provisional title in English	ICT tool
DE	Books and Modern Media	OHP
	Character stories	example of CV, style sheet of a CV, photographs of people, (Internet), PC, blackboard or OHP
	London Sights	E-mail
	I can do - My hands	
EL	Schools Here and There	Internet sites, Skype, building (part of) website
	Love Through Ages	You tube, word processor, email
	London Zoo	Interactive Whiteboard or Computer with Video Projector, PowerPoint Presentations, Internet Connection
	TV Commercials	picture or video manager, photo story
IT	Dinner invitation	
	On a desert island	
	Find the treasure	
	Tourist promotion website	making website
HU	Introducing a City	websites of cities
	Without Sound	You Tube
	Stereotypes	Film, PowerPoint
	How would you finish the story?	You Tube
NL	What do you want to be?	websites on jobs
	Sell your stuff	recording, on-line pronunciation/vocabulary guide
	Telling people about your hobbies	recording; upload in language portfolio
	Introduce yourself to your host family	on line dictionary, on line style sheet
PT	Mapping directions	Google Earth; Google maps; Bing maps; email
	Create a blog to promote your city/school	Pupils write an original text, upload movie makers files to present their school, city, culture and sites of interest. They can use pictures and PowerPoint files. Pen friends comment on them and also produce their own blog
	Whodunit	Flickr; email
	Making a Portuguese Gastronomy TV Show	recording of gastronomy programme
UK	Birthday Party Invite	On-line French dictionary ; PowerPoint's
	Les régions françaises	websites; word; PowerPoint
	Les vacances	websites
	Visit to Paris	list of websites; PowerPoint
TR	Logbook of a century	PowerPoint presentation / on-line photo album with audio commentaries
	Create a Tourist Brochure	YouTube, Flickr, Wordpress
	Describe your room	Word, weblog
	Your favourite friend	Face book, YouTube

Table 2. ICT tools present in learning tasks.

From the above table it appears that most learning tasks involve the use of ICT tools, although the diversity of the tools is striking. Some tasks require the learners to use

tools that are no longer found in some schools (OHP), whereas other tasks require the use of recent Web 2.0 applications. It would be an interesting exercise to see if the level of ICT applications found in the selected learning tasks shows a correlation with the state of the integration of ICT in language learning in the country concerned. At first sight the reader might be tempted to conclude that some (but certainly not all) Mediterranean countries have made the most impressive advances, where ICT integration is concerned. Further study would be needed before such a conclusion can be drawn.

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