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# COMPUTER-BASED TEACHING OF SLOVAK AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

JANA BICÁKOVÁ – VIERA NEMČOKOVÁ – HEDVIGA SEMANOVÁ

Since 2004 the Slovak Republic has been the member of The European Union and Slovak language has become one of the EU languages. The fact is that not very many EU members speak Slovak. We are very pleased that the situation is changing. A group of people with specific requirements has appeared - they need Slovak. We are talking about businessmen, managers, bankers, professionals in tourism and students. This target group indicates the need of learning Slovak. The analysis of questionnaires has shown that this target group is interested in everyday Slovak. These people have to be able to communicate in Slovak in situations like buying a ticket, talking about the family...socializing. It is clear that these potential learners of Slovak need practice - orientated just-in time and just-in place language course of Slovak.

## **The aims of the project and the project description**

The Department of Languages of the Technical University of Košice (TU) is involved in the project CALL @ C&S – under the framework of Socrates / Lingua II together with Charles University in Prague, the Czech University of Agriculture in Prague, the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra and University of Seville, Spain. The Polytechnic University of Valencia, Spain is the coordinator of the project.

The CALL @ C&S – on-line courseware for learners of Czech and Slovak project aims to use the existing Proyecto In@enio on-line Computer Assisted Language Learning Authoring Tool developed at the Polytechnic University of Valencia to design and deliver a multimedia level A1 and A2 courses for learners of Czech and parallel on-line courses of Slovak. The two foreign language courses initially have four support languages – Spanish, English, German and French. The Department of Languages of TU has been developing the on-line course of Slovak language level A2 based on the European Framework of Languages.

The course consists of 10 units delivering all language skills required for the level A2. Each unit approximately needs six hours of study.

All the texts – reading materials – are authentic and match the level A2. The sentences are short, grammar is simple, the vocabulary covers everyday situations. To write the suitable texts was time-consuming. Each text was simplified several times to match the level A2.

The students work on their own and without any tutorial. There is no time

restriction – students can work any time and at any place. The level of learning autonomy is high.

All the units include grammar, vocabulary, functional language, exercises, glossary, info reading and links to useful web pages, audio and video. A reader and a grammar book are also a part of the course. The reader consists of ten additional texts bringing more information about Slovakia. All the texts are in Slovak without the parallel text in one of the support languages. The reader is an optional part of the course. The grammar book covers all the grammar issues from the units. It offers complex description of grammar of the Slovak language based on structures. The definitions are as simple as possible. All the definitions are translated to one of the support languages.

The course is designed for foreigners having no or minimum knowledge of Slovak or other Slavonic language. This is a crucial fact the authors had to take into consideration. As the course we have developed is designed for the level A2, which means a limited knowledge of the language, the authors had to deal with the problem of covering the topics of the units by using adequate vocabulary. The authors had to concentrate very much on the length of the sentences, which was quite difficult at the beginning. Short simple sentences and short complex sentences are used in the texts.

All the topics of the units (e.g. Vraciam sa na Slovensko., Idem do kina, divadla, Cestujeme mestskou dopravou.) are linked to those situations which are actual in common life and require the vocabulary which enables participants to survive in a foreign country. The vocabulary is practised several times in different types of exercises such as gap-filling, true-false, multiple choice, clickable options, etc.

Functional language is based on the topics and vocabulary of the units. The advantage of the e-learning method in this case is that it provides a solution combining several different methods of delivery. The functional language can be practised in a written and oral form.

The collaboration software of the on-line course provides a precisely defined range of exercise types which can be considered as a disadvantage for the authors but we have to emphasise that many exercise types are multifunctional, offering the possibility of blended teaching-learning. E.g. association exercises / pull-down menu with several options / include listening, reading, speaking or writing.

From the psychological point of view if a student practises words and expressions several times and more senses are involved, he / she can remember them in a shorter time and the ability to use the new vocabulary in a proper way is increasing.

Beside developing the course itself, the authors had to develop the structure of the main menu and the menu of the unit in the close cooperation with the IT expert (Enclosure No. 1)

### **In@enio – authoring tool**

In@enio is an on-line tool based on template approach to authoring which allows to design own materials, creates database with these materials and makes it available to other users and automatically converts these materials learner ready materials. It integrates on-line authoring and learning environment divided into separated units (see Sanches). This authoring tool was developed as a universal tool for writing study materials. First it was tested in the process of writing English on-line language course at the Polytechnical University of Valencia. The team from the University of Valencia had developed In@enio before they started to develop the English interactive on-line course. The authoring tool is being tested now on developing Czech and Slovak on-line language courses.

The advantage of this tool is that the authors can directly write in the code – i.e. part called redactor. It is very easy to add a new text or to change it. The disadvantage is that the types of exercises are given. CA LL is often associated with strongly guided methods that produce rather rigid structures (Neumeier, 2005, 172). On the other hand it is possible to develop a new template for a new type of exercise. It is clear that the cooperation with an IT expert is vital. The intention is to make this authoring tool accessible to public free of charge in future.

### **Evaluation procedure**

In@enio as an authoring tool has been evaluated. The content of the Slovak on-line course A2 has to undergo the process of evaluation. The first step is the expertise. The on-line pilot course will be held in autumn. It will be on line course without tutorial. The students will be required to fill in the questionnaire, to write a report, to sit for the interview. The results of those will be analysed and implemented in the final version.

### **Conclusion:**

This multimedia interactive on-line language course enables the learners to get the knowledge of basic Slovak in quite a short time and it covers all the four language skills. In@enio as an authoring tool can be applied not only for writing language study materials but also for other subjects in our opinion.

## Literature

- Sanz, Ana Gimeno: Proyecto In@enio: creating FL web-delivered multimedia learning materials (2001), *www.upv.es*
- Neumeier, Petra: „A close look at blended learning-parameters for designing a blended learning environment for language teaching and learning”, in *ReCall 17*, Cambridge University Press 2005, p. 172

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## Enclosures

### *Enclosure 1: Menu of the unit*

*LEKCIA 2: Cestujeme vlakom, mestskou dopravou (Travelling by train, city transport)*

#### GRAMATIKA (Grammar):

podmienkové vety - prítomný čas, minulý čas  
lokál singuláru substantív

#### SLOVNÁ ZÁSoba (Vocabulary):

mestské dopravné prostriedky  
v informačnej kancelárii  
na železničnej stanici  
história dopravy na Slovensku

#### FUNKCIE (Functional Language):

porozumieť hláseniu o odchode a príchode vlakov  
kúpiť si cestovný lístok  
získať informácie o doprave

#### CVIČENIA (Exercises):

čítanie / reading/ - cvičenia 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 16, 18, 19, 20  
počúvanie / listening/ - cvičenia: 9, 11, 12, 13  
gramatika / grammar/ - cvičenia: 10, 14, 15, 17  
písanie / writing/ - cvičenia: 22  
hovorenie / speaking/ - cvičenie: 21  
video- cvičenie: 6

## Glosár

**Enclosure 2: Template****Exercise 11****ASSOCIATION EXERCISES (PULL-DOWN MENU WITH SEVERAL OPTIONS)**

Author: **Hedviga, Jana, Viera**  
 Exercise: **Listening**  
 Language: **Slovak**  
 Level: **,A2'**  
 Section: **Listening comprehension (CO)**  
 Code: **ESL A2, CO 11**

Introductory text	Vypočujte si dialóg v informačnej kancelári a potom označte správne/S/ a nesprávne /N/ vety. / Listen to the above dialogue in the information office, then decide whether the following statements are TRUE /S/ or FALSE /N/.	
Text Posluch (Listening):	Options:	
1. Rýchlik do Popradu nie je povinne miestenkový.	[S] [N]	
2. V dopoludňajších hodinách odchádzajú tri rýchliky do Popradu.	[S] [N]	
3. Vo všetkých rýchlikoch sú reštauračné vozne.	[S] [N]	
4. Cestovný lístok do Popradu stojí 300 SK.	[S] [N]	
5. Z Košíc do Popradu chodí priamy vlak.	[S] [N]	
6. Medzi Košicami a Popradom nepremávajú osobné vlaky.	[S] [N]	
Correct answers	Correct answers:	IN, 2N, 3S, 4S, 5S, 6N

Type of clip:  
 None /  / Video  
 See complete answer:  
 / No

Auto-play clip: Yes /   
 Case sensitive:  / No

No limit of attempts:  
 / No  
 Time limit (0=no limit): 0