Language and culture for migrants through ICT and media educational pills

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Abstract

Spain, like many other countries, has faced high migration influx in the last decades and consequently has favoured the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language, a relatively new subject in our country. As a result of the growing number of immigrants, regional, national and European educational boards have invested in measures concerning intercultural awareness, social inclusion and language acquisition. Though the variety of textbooks for this purpose is scarce or null, being tailor-made when necessary, the material provided by the Internet and other media is valued *for immediate, cost-effective and wide-ranging access to authentic materials, irrespective of the level of location of language learners and teacher* (Bryram, ed., 2004, p. 311). These are regarded as a powerful set of teaching resources to promote effective communication, language and culture acquisition (Tanrıverdi, 2008). In this light, our work presents an innovative research-based proposal to support migrant integration through the development of communicative competences beyond the mere acquisition of instructional/survival language. The proposal, based on the LiMe Project (http://www.languages-in-media.eu/), provides a broad array of educational pills and methodological tips to help migrant population decode language and culture as portrayed in various types of media and to fit learners, who might find managing the new technologies a daunting task, into the language, culture and the host country.

Keywords: media, ICTs, immigrants, pills, platform.

1. Background

The national map of Spain has been considerably modified over the last few years, especially in the last decade – Spain has changed from being an exporter of emigrants to being a receiver of people from different nationalities. There are now more than 5 million foreigners living in Spain (officially registered by INE - Statistics National Institute), giving rise to a complex and heterogeneous population. There are 5.363.688 (12.14% of the total population) foreigners and

among the different nationalities, the following stand out: Romania, Morocco, Ecuador, Colombia, UK, Italy, China, Bulgaria, Bolivia, Peru, and Portugal to name a few.

The growth of the immigrant population has favoured the teaching of Spanish as a second language, a relatively new subject, which has been successfully developed over the last decade. Beyond compulsory free education (primary and high school), Spanish for Foreigners curricula (ELE -*Español para Extranjeros*) have focused on teaching the language and a great number of course books and materials have been developed, as well as research conducted based on teaching these students. Schools, universities or enterprises specialized in Spanish for Foreigners are mainly private.

Nevertheless, the number of textbooks is limited and teachers turn to the Internet to retrieve information and authentic materials (Bryram, ed., 2004, p. 311) in order to teach both language and culture, with the purpose of achieving a satisfactory degree of effective communication and customs and habits understanding and acquisition (Tanrıverdi, 2008).

This lack of tangible materials caused the development of research and the creation of course books to teach immigrants. Many schools where Spanish for Foreigners courses are taught employ materials made or adapted by teachers, who are sometimes experts in Spanish for Foreigners, but often use material intended for other subjects.

This is the case of adult public education centers (EPA – *Educación de Personas Adultas*) funded by municipal or regional governments. The law regulating these centers is in *Título III* from *Ley Orgánica de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo de 1990* (LOGSE), and in chapter XII from *Libro Blanco de Educación de Adultos*. The curricula dedicated to immigrants were introduced after this law. Nowadays, most Spanish for Foreigners courses are taught in EPAs, and they belong to the non-formal education sector. They are basic language courses, with the purpose of teaching immigrants to communicate effectively. Additionally, to develop awareness of cultural differences, Immigrants Participation and Integration Centers (*Centros de Participación e Integración de Inmigrantes*) aim to develop the wellbeing of immigrants and the local population through initiatives promoting intercultural coexistence. These centers are public entities financed by the Immigration and Cooperation Agency of the various regional governments and managed by different associations representing different nationalities. They have a homogeneous structure and functioning, but they adapt to the user's profile.

2. ICTs for learning the host country's language and culture

Having realized the importance of language acquisition for foreign-born citizens and locals, compulsory L2 requirements for migrants were introduced in Europe. Launched in 2005 following the revised Lisbon Agenda, the policy framework 'i2010: A European Information Society for Growth and Employment' has clearly established digital inclusion as an EU strategic policy goal. Everybody living in Europe should have the opportunity to use information and communication technologies (ICT) to benefit from ICT use by service providers, intermediaries and other agents addressing their needs.

Although traditional media are still very important since they are a powerful source offering real interaction with the target language and culture, and are valuable instructional and superior to the simplified language in edited text (newspapers, photographs, promotional leaflets, etc.), technologies are increasingly employed to communicate, inform, and learn about L2 culture. Smartphones, tablets and computers have become an indispensable tool as they bring together a great variety of media. According to the 13th edition of the annual report by *Telefónica* called "The Information Society in Spain", 63,2% of mobile phone users now have a smartphone, the highest rate in the UE. Therefore, an important tendency is the development of applications for

these devices, some of which are educational

Though migration has contributed to the richness in diversity of cultures in developed countries, the exclusion of non-national residents from the sphere of social equality within host countries provokes concerns about their integration. The second comprehensive immigration plan ruled by the European Union tries to mitigate this social controversy (Decree 92/2006, 9 May). In this light, LiMe[1] - Languages in Media- (http://www.languages-in-media.eu/) project, financially supported by the Lifelong Learning European Programme, contributes to the enhancement of teaching and learning a foreign language and strengthening social inclusion in education, especially among migrants, through the exploitation of media and a virtual learning platform.

3. LiMe project: aims, methodology and deliverables

The aim of this European project is, first of all, to provide tools to decode the language and culture portrayed in the multimedia environment around migrants, and second, to help learners develop a sense of belonging and understanding towards national culture, strengthening social inclusion, especially among migrants through ICT and media educational pills. In the pursuit of the objectives mentioned above (to help migrants overcome sociocultural barriers and solve their everyday conflicts by acquiring language competences and integrating culture as a means of social inclusion), the partners studied different types of media and selected some traditional printed media such as newspapers, photographs, magazines, billboards/signages and, audiovisual media such as movie trailers, TV soap operas, radio traffic, radio news, music videos, music, videos for YouTube, and social networks. These pills, which you can see below, used for the enhancement of teaching and learning, promote integration through innovating media-related exercises.

Figure 1: Media included in the course

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[1] LiMe – Languages in Media - KA2 Languages - Project No. 530866-LLP-1-2012-1-DE-KA2-KA2MP

Some tangible deliveries are: the development of a virtual learning platform which hosts learning materials from A2 to B2 (CEFR); and a teacher training package for integrating media into language teaching intended for teachers and trainers. The platform, materials and package were developed by the project partners in each participating country (Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom) and the partners were in charge of the creation of educational pills and authentic material. The virtual platform will provide support for language teachers and trainers in teaching languages with media support.
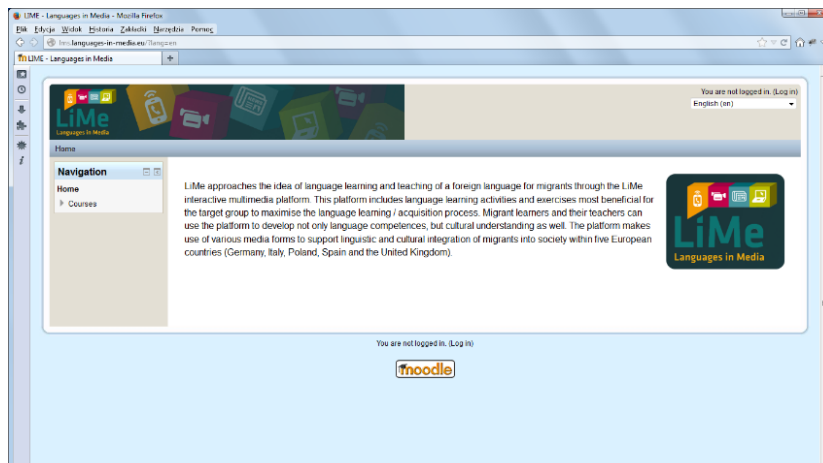

Figure 2: Platform (*http://lms.languages-in-media.eu*)

Several piloting sessions were devised in various classroom settings, which provided each participating country with feedback on the usefulness of the platform. The last step of the piloting which started on 23rd September and ended on 10th October, 2014 involved teachers from different institutions all over Spain (Cruz Roja, CEPAIM (Consortium of Entities for Integral Action with Migrants), Official School of Languages, Fundación Ruy López (Foundation for cultural awareness and social integration), and thirty-one students from those aforementioned institutions participated in a trial use of the platform and at least six resources. Our piloting was represented by two well differentiated groups of immigrants, illiterate and literate, who come from different backgrounds and cultures.

4. Results from piloting sessions and workshops

Six week-pilot sessions were designed aimed at (1) teacher, trainers and institutions evaluations of the platform and its resources, and (2) assessment of migrant population interaction with the material. The first evaluation phase included at least 10 teachers and experts per country (particularly 13 teachers in Spain). The piloting began with the selection of potential evaluators (language teachers and teacher trainers) to take part in a national workshop to test the training package (media, activities, online resources, the platform and a teacher training guide), followed by another piloting event where 31 migrant learners tested the learning platform and all the media resources in each country.

Teachers' feedback:
Not many changes were suggested and those mainly covered elements such as simplifying

formats. Participants also suggested a range of possible additions, such as including immigrants' profiles, the description of what we can expect from the selected links. As for the general feedback on the LiMe Training Package, most participants agreed they were able to navigate the LiMe platform easily, the layout and formatting of the training package was easy to use as an instructional guide and they felt that the training package greatly improved their understanding and ability to use the LiMe platform with learners.

Students' feedback:

The platform and resources have been positively assessed by the students who have taken part in the piloting, being the cultural section one of the most appealing contents for most students, except from those who claim not to understand it because of their low level (language and culture), circumstance which may prevent them from comprehending subtle elements embedded in any language.

The overall turnout for the pilot was rather pleasing for the partners since the aim of including 50 teachers and 150 learners was met. Around 178 migrants with 40 different nationalities and 43 teachers tested the materials with learners. On the other hand, 67 teachers took part in the national workshops on the LiMe learning platform and the training package.

Figure 3: Pilot Session (Trainers)

Exploitation and sustainability: results will be used to challenge the educational community, influence usage and policy change at national and European levels.

5. Conclusion

This initiative will benefit teachers, teacher trainers and other stakeholders involved in language teaching, who will be able to make use of the training activities and materials, as well as other resources on the platform. Additionally, awareness will be raised on the importance of integrating pedagogy and technology, tackling obstacles that might currently hinder effective

integration of ICT in their teaching context, while building on their own strengths and experiences, arduous task within our stereotype of migrant learners.

A broad array of tools for engaging students with high levels of autonomy into effective language experiences is provided. Besides, the usage of these resources, platforms and tools would help them improve the language skills minimizing any difficulties they find, contributing to an increase in innovative teaching and, therefore, encouraging the process of lifelong learning. It is crucial to create tools and means to support the migrant population to overcome social boundaries, aid in the acculturation process, and integrate earlier into the host culture at a time when public and private institutions offer scarce assistance to this sector of society.

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