One-to-one online teaching using Skype and Google Docs

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Abstract: The article presents some ideas for online lessons on Skype with the use of Google Docs. The theoretical part explains shortly asynchronous and synchronous e-learning. We also comment on the advantages and disadvantages of both manners of e-learning. Practical exercises are presented in the second part. They are prepared to use synchronous methods and tools (real-time, online contact). Exercises are meant to make use of various Google Drive applications. All the tasks are adjusted to different learning styles. The first task is connected with remembering and repeating word chunks and collocations. The second task takes advantage of a real photo and the possibility of tagging the photo which exists in Google Drawing. The third task applies both synchronous and asynchronous e-learning strategies and concentrates on online correction of previously written homework. The last task involves internet searching of real websites and simulating e-mail exchange with the landlord.

Key words: online-teaching, one-to-one teaching, Google docs, practical exercises.

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to show the possibilities given by Web 2.0 tools for teaching one-to-one language lessons and to demonstrate some practical examples of the usage of Google Docs during online classes. The article is based on our experiences in teaching online of three foreign languages to people based in Poland, Norway and Spain. It consists of two parts. The first one is theoretical and explains theoretical concepts of e-learning, both synchronous and asynchronous, highlighting also the assets of both types of teaching. The practical part describes several exercises to be used during online lessons. The exercises are conducted with the use of the Google Docs applications mostly during real-time meetings yet with some elements of asynchronous e-learning as well.

2. Synchronous and asynchronous e-learning

E-learning means learning and teaching through network technologies. There are two main types of e-learning: synchronous and asynchronous (Hockly and Clandfield 2010: 12). Synchronous learning requires real-time, online contact student - teacher. The tools that are used for such learning are mainly video-conferencing (Skype, Google Hangouts, Gotomeeting), as well as chats and webinars. **Asynchronous learning** does not require real-time participation. Students can choose a time convenient for them. The

most popular tools used for such learning are: e-mail, forums and discussion boards, written assignments and podcasts.

According to the study made by Hrastinski **synchronous learning** increases learners' commitment thanks to the quick response expected from both students and the teacher, upgrades motivation and resembles everyday communication. Students feel thus more committed and motivated.

Assets of asynchronous learning are amongst others: in the case of homework – the student has more time to think. Written work can also be a reference for the student for his later work (Hrastinski: 2008).

3. Some examples of the usage of Google Docs for online lessons
3.1. Find out the missing words. Exercise in Google Documents
3.1.1. The procedure

1. The teacher takes a text from a textbook or any other material that has been covered recently. She pastes or rewrites it into a Google document. Then she deletes one word from each (or almost each) sentence.

2. During the lesson, the student's task is to read the text filling in the correct words. The student does not write them in the text, only reads it.

3. When the student has filled the whole text, the teacher removes more words from each sentence.

4. Again, the student reads the whole text filling in the gaps.

5. The whole procedure is repeated as many times, as the teacher thinks it appropriate.

6. Finally the student ends up with a task where they have to recreate almost the whole text.

It works especially well for the dialogues, as they are easier to remember.
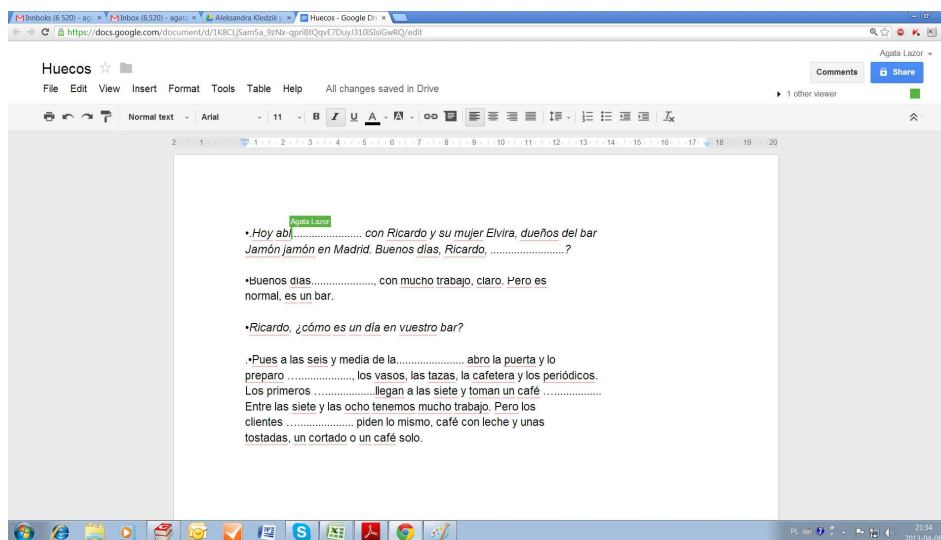

Figure 1: Screenshot: The student filling in blank spaces in Google Documents

3.1.2. The aim of the exercise

To help the student revise vocabulary from the previous lesson and concentrate on collocations, grammatical structures and pronunciation. It is commonly known that

vocabulary is easiest to memorize, not when a word appears separately, as a single vocabulary unit to remember, but as a part of a phrase. This is why, when recreating the text, the student will have to reflect on the collocations and word chunks that appear there. By doing it several times and with different vocabulary units, they will concentrate also on collocations that are easy to understand when they appear in the text, but not always easy to recreate. Apart from that by reading the text again and again, Student will memorize the collocations from the material. Additionally they may better their pronunciation and concentrate on the issues that they normally do not pay attention to. Finally, an attempt to remember the whole text could be also fun for the student.

3.2. Tag the kitchen. Exercise in Google Drawing
The second exercise concentrates on vocabulary and oral presentation.

3.2.1. The procedure
1. The student shares with the teacher the picture of their kitchen or any other room in their flat. The file is in JPG format and is placed in Google Docs.
2. During the lesson the student has to label as many objects in the room as possible, marking the chosen piece of furniture or any other thing and tagging it the commentary field (the option is available for every Google Docs user).
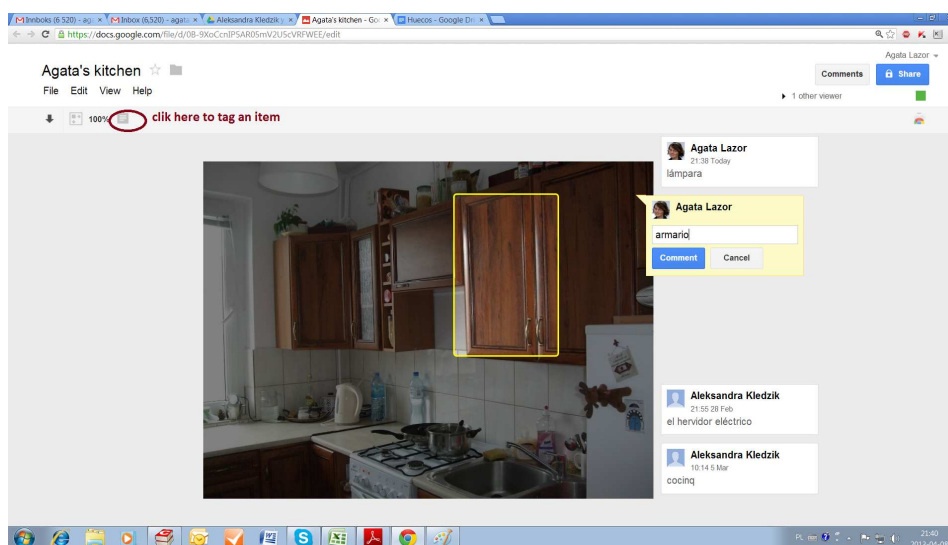

Figure 2: Screenshot: The student tagging her kitchen and naming the items

3.2.2. The aim of the exercise
To concentrate on vocabulary and oral presentation as well as to connect every vocabulary item to a picture. Most people have a visual learning style, so connecting objects with the words will help them remember the vocabulary. The action of tagging and labelling the pieces of furniture will also engage Students who have more kinaesthetic learning style, while reading aloud will appeal to those who remember most by listening (auditory learners), This exercise appeals to Students with various learning styles and helps each Student engage their different senses in the learning process.

3.3. Online correcting the written assignment in Google Documents
3.3.1. The procedure
1. The student gets a written assignment, writes a short text and places it in the folder that they share with the teacher.
2. The teacher reads the text and highlights the mistakes: the one that Student will be able to correct themselves in one colour and the ones that are too difficult for the student to correct in another colour.
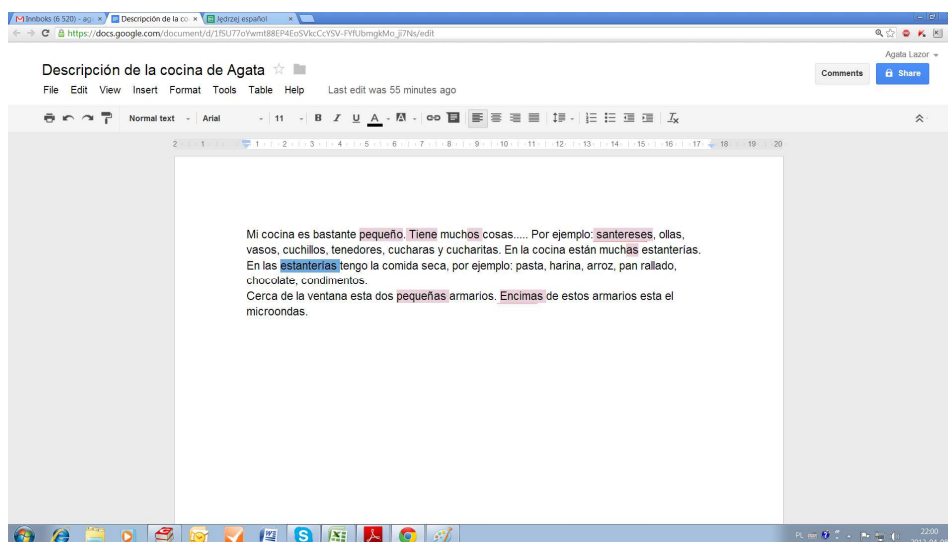3. During the lesson the student tries to correct the mistakes aided by the teacher.

Figure 3: Screenshot: The student's assignment with
the highlighted mistakes, ready to correct by the student.

3.3.2. The aim of the exercise
To make the student more aware of their mistakes. By reflecting on the subject and correcting the mistakes by themselves, the student will be able to actively find the correct answers, which will enhance the learning process. The student will also be more engaged in the activity than if they just listened to a teacher telling them what mistakes they had made. Last but not least: when the teacher only must highlight the mistakes and does not have to correct them all, checking is done much more quickly. Thus, they will be able to give an assignment like this more often and will not be overburdened by correcting every single mistake.

3.3.3. Alternations
If the teacher does not want to use lesson time for checking, the student may get this task as homework and only after the student has tried to correct the highlighted mistakes on their own, will the teacher check again and make necessary corrections. The procedure works also for ordinary homework like grammar and vocabulary exercises.

3.4. E-mail from the landlord. Exercise in Google Documents
3.4.1. The procedure
1. The Teacher finds a web page with ads for the rent of house.

2. The student chooses the one that they find most interesting. It will be the flat/house that they will try to rent. They scan the text and ask about words that make it impossible for them to understand.
3. The teacher asks a few questions concerning the flat/house to check comprehension (it for example: "how much is the rent?", "could we negotiate the price?", "where is the flat/house located?").
4. The teacher creates a document in Google Docs and asks the student to write a short enquiry about the flat asking about things that they find important.
5. The teacher answers the letter behind the student's message.
6. The student has to write one more answer to make an appointment or negotiate some of the issues mentioned by the landlord.

3.4.2. The aim of the exercise

To practice vocabulary connected with the letting of a flat, furniture, fixtures and fittings in a flat etc. When answering the email from a potential tenant, the student also practices spontaneous communication and writing, as everything is done in written form. The exercise also gives them a "real-life" experience with the encounter with real material and real problems that a person living in a foreign country might have.

3.4.3. Alternations

Part of the task may be performed asynchronously: the student may have to answer the letter from a potential landlord as a homework. Alternatively the student may also be a landlord answering an inquiry from a potential tenant.

4. Conclusion

The above mentioned exercises are just a few of the many possibilities of the usage of Google Docs for synchronous online teaching. Through this article we wanted to point out some opportunities given by these tools. It is important that each exercise can be easiliy adapted to different needs and levels of the students. We took into account a variety of learning styles and different language skills that a student should acquire. We hope teachers and learners find our ideas useful.

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