eCuisine - A Model For Interactive E-Learning
To Enhance Vocational Conversation And
To Raise Intercultural Awareness In The Hospitality Sector

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Abstract.   *eCuisine* is a project transferring knowledge and material established in existing language learning programs for schools and the wider field of vocational education and training into the field of gastronomy, hospitality and service. *eCuisine* expands the range of the UK developed language learning program *Tick-Tack* and the much elaborated *EuroCatering Language Learning* (ECLT) program. The project seeks a greater understanding through transnational cooperation in a European context of the specific language and cultural awareness needs as well as of the learning culture of SMEs in the Hospitality and Leisure sector. The project is essentially aimed at reducing barriers to work mobility, increasing international understanding and cooperation, supporting a flexible delivery mode, modern learning requirements with attractive and interactive e-learning materials. The project foresees a glossary and description of dishes from all partner countries with detailed information regarding preparation techniques, the ethnic nature of the dishes as well as recommendations for consumers and chefs that could be accessed through interactive devices (smart phones, tablets etc.) that could be used both for informative as well as education and training purposes.

Introduction

The importance of education and training for the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy. The "Agenda for new skills and jobs", published by the European Commission in November 2010 highlights the necessity that "all EU citizens should have the opportunity to acquire and develop the mix of knowledge, skills and aptitudes they need to succeed in the labour market. To this end, education and training systems must deliver the right mix of skills, including digital and transversal key competences, media literacy, and communication in a foreign language" [1].

The modern labour market is facing new challenges with increasing mobility of the labour force and the rapid growth of tourism, which is one of the biggest and fast expanding European economic sectors. These challenges at the same time provide excellent opportunities for mobility of the labour force that is adequately educated and trained to face these challenges. The mixture of language learning combined with the ability to make use of new media and technologies is one of the basics in tourism education. Language competency is often described as a threshold skill for entry into the tourism trade in order to enhance people's possibilities for mobility within the tourism labour market. Cross-European studies have highlighted the need for enhancing language skills and intercultural awareness training of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Varying terminology has been used in discussions about the role of culture in language teaching. One of the terms which has gained prominence is cultural awareness.

Understanding the nature of the relationship between language and culture is central to the process of learning another language. Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino and Kohler [2] describe it as follows "Intercultural language learning involves developing with learners understanding of their own language(s) and culture(s) in relation to an additional language and culture. Learning to communicate in an additional language involves developing an awareness of the ways in which

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culture interrelates with language whenever it is used. Indeed Mitchel and Myles [3] point out that "researchers in language socialization tradition believe that language and culture are not separable, but are acquired together with each providing support for the development of the other". There is no doubt that language learning contributes to intercultural learning and empathy which is a basic need in the hospitality industry.

In his speech at the conference "Travelling Languages: Culture, Communication and Translation in a Mobile World", held from 03-05 December 2010 in Leeds, UK, the lecturer Klaus Pfatschbacher from the University of Applied Sciences in Krems makes clear that "students are not only asked to widen their lexical knowledge, they are also expected to go beyond the level of simple language acquisition. As touristic activities continuously force students to cope with cultural encounters, they are asked to understand foreign cultures in detail in order to serve international clients best. All in all, foreign language teaching assumes the responsibility to link grammar, syntax or lexical items to a higher level dominated by social interaction, dialogue and cultural understanding. Tourism can be seen as an outstanding manifestation of these complex elements". By following this understanding of language teaching it is essential to "cross borders" already in the development of learning and teaching programs as intended in the proposed project.

Dealing with dishes from other countries, even if basically on language level, will also encourage those in the hotel-tourism sector to foster the interest of students and their teachers in the culinary tradition of other countries. Skills and knowledge relating to food and drink and to their choice enhances the pleasure and enjoyment of eating and drinking. Such pleasures are central to gastronomic tourism which is developing as a subset of cultural tourism where the experience of participating in a different culture is central. The hospitality industry has a natural role in the provision of these experiences but it also has the opportunity to enhance the enjoyment of such experiences through the provision of relevant information. It is therefore appropriate that hospitality education and training include a gastronomy component in order to give students a greater understanding of the history and culture of food and drink (Dr. Barbara Santich, [4]. Very often it is the quick/immediate response to "simple" questions, such as when ordering meals from a menu in a foreign country, that initiates customer satisfaction and intercultural understanding. Thus, proper language use in the tourist/host interaction could enrich the tourist experience and satisfaction leading to repeat visits and increased tourist receipts. This paper gives an overview of the project *eCuisine* which is essentially aimed at reducing barriers to work mobility in the hospitality sector, foster language learning and intercultural awareness by supporting a flexible delivery mode, modern learning requirements with attractive and interactive e-learning materials and enriching the tourist experience and satisfaction.

1. *eCuisine* - interactive e-learning to enhance vocational conversation and intercultural awareness

This part of the paper focuses on the main features of the EU Leonardo do Vinci Transfer of Innovation project "*eCuisine* - A Model for Interactive Learning to Enhance Vocational Conversation and to Arouse International Awareness in the Hospitality Sector" [5] implemented during the period 2012-2014, the project No. 2012-1-AT1-LEO05-06979. The project involves 7 partners: Unternehmensberatung Heffeter (Austria, leading partner), Primrose Publishing (United Kingdom), Tourismusschulen Klessheim (Austria), Turiba University (Latvia), Vilniaus Kolegija (Lithuania), Srednja šola za gostinstvo in turizem Celje (Slovenia), Turistička i ugostiteljska škola Dubrovnik (Croatia) and GMS Hutter (Austria).

There are an increasing number of applications dealing with cuisine/cooking available in the style of traditional recipe books, providing information about ingredients, quantities of ingredients and ways of preparation. Those dealing with gastronomy give directions and recommendations for finding a nice place for dining, as well as make ordering easier/quicker for both guests and personnel, or allow payment via smartphone. There are no applications available though that would give more detailed descriptions about the ingredients or the ways of preparation, about the region in which the selected dish is traditionally prepared, and they say nothing of cultural and historic data or "stories" that change simple menu selection into an unforgettable adventure. The best solution would be to have such a collection of information easily, quickly and neatly arranged in a single application. This is one of the basic concepts of the project *eCuisine*, which is a project transferring knowledge and material established in existing language learning programs for schools and the wider field of vocational education and training into the field of gastronomy, hospitality and service. *eCuisine* expands the range of the UK developed language learning program *Tick-Tack* and the much elaborated EuroCatering Language Learning (ECLT) program.

Tick-Tack as such is basic software with multilingual word-processing facilities and structure for running various programs (e.g. business, travel) including the development of materials for conducting seminars, workshops and training courses in universities, schools and companies. Teachers and trainers are introduced how they can improve their effectiveness in using their respective business language more quickly and flexibly. This was the original idea in the Italian LdV project "*Tick-Tack-Tech* for technical engineers. On the other hand the project "EuroCatering Language Training" (ECLT) was designed as "A free language kit for professionals in the kitchen and restaurant" which is now available online in 7 languages (English, French, Spanish, Galician, Slovenian, Norwegian, Dutch). By relying on the structures

of the existing programs (esp. the *Tick-Tack* software) *eCuisine* is based on well implemented and widely tested program structures which helps to accelerate the progress considerably as development processes will not start at the very beginning. The learning concepts will be revised and adapted to the use of communication devices. Moreover the planned development of apps will be made applicable for the use on ordering devices in the catering and restaurant service.

The key objectives of the programme are following:

i) to support participants in training and further training activities in the acquisition and the use of knowledge, skills and qualifications to facilitate personal development, employability and participation in the European labour market - students of vocational as well as higher education institutions in the field of food and catering;

ii) to support improvements in quality and innovation in vocational education and training systems, institutions and practices - use a wide variety of flexible delivery modes, with attractive and interactive e-learning materials;

iii) to enhance the attractiveness of vocational education and training and mobility for employers and individuals and to facilitate the mobility of working trainees - creating an extended database that covers not only traditional recipes with ingredients and preparation methods but also interesting ethnic and cultural contexts, recommendations and advice thereby supplementing the knowledge base of future employees in the hospitality sector;

iv) to improve the quality and to increase the volume of cooperation between institutions or organisations providing learning opportunities, enterprises, social partners and other relevant bodies throughout Europe - the project involves 8 partners from 5 different EU member states including representatives of vocational education, higher education and the industry.

2. The project stages

The project will be implemented over a two year period and will include the following stages.

1. Analysing the national cuisine of 5 partner countries (Austria, Latvia, Lithuania, Croatia and Slovenia), selecting dishes that best represent the region and then preparing descriptions and word lists describing national cuisine in the national language.

2. Appending the dishes with a photograph and making short translations of the dishes into English.

3. Creating a set of study materials based on the data and description of the dishes and piloting the materials with students; developing a web app incorporating the data gathered on the various cuisines which could be used by the hospitality industry and the general public;

development of DVD learning software and training other teachers or trainers who would be involved in the programme after the project duration has come to an end thereby ensuring continuity.

3. Analysis and descriptions of the national cuisines

The national cuisine of Austria is in the centre of the project and the emphasis is not only on the analysis of the Austrian cuisine but also to make Austrians aware of their heritage and the opportunities of either work or tradition. Dishes are not just to be collected and translated as easily available in existing online dictionaries but also explained and described to enable people in the industry as well as in practice oriented educational programs to start vocational conversation with guests from project partner countries without barriers of grammar and vocabulary. Similarly at least 30 highlights of national cuisines of the partner countries were developed as well in their own language. The dishes were broken down into categories such as cold starters, soups, hot starters, main courses and desserts. The categories were chosen in accordance to how the same may appear on different menus. The descriptions included information regarding the type of dish whether it is vegetarian, meat, fish or a seafood dish, the ingredients, method of preparation, preparation time and ways of serving the dish. In order to address intercultural issues the descriptions also included information regarding the geographic region within country, the ethnic context and whether the dish can be compared to other dishes worldwide. The tourist satisfaction can also be enhanced by gathering information regarding recommendations and medical advice.

4. Translation of dishes into English

The dishes and their descriptions will be translated into English and (via English) into the respective languages of the partner countries. The project is meant to enhance mobility and cross cultural understanding by learning of languages especially on the applied knowledge of dishes, cuisines and culinary activities. The translations of the data base will definitely involve challenges, arising from the language diversity and specific features of the gastronomy-related vocabulary. Language barriers are mostly the reason for poor intercultural knowledge which is not developed enough to break down national borders and resentments. The project is therefore also intended to start intercultural curiosity via diminishing language borders and enhancing cultural and language diversity. The target groups will have the opportunity to use other EU languages particularly when dealing with traditional dishes and their original names which sometimes can not be translated word by word. The online availability of the program itself in the partner languages will encourage students to switch between the languages. This is encouraged

by the main idea of the program as being not grammar based but word list and text-module/boilerplate focused. Due to the easy access via electronical devices and the transfer of existing software products to modern communication systems as smart-phones with apps and training DVDs customers are also encouraged to try dishes that they would otherwise have a more sceptic approach because of language barriers and a lack of explanation.

5. Course methodology

The methodological/didactic approaches are based on the experience (strengths, weaknesses) from the Eurocatering Language Training (ELT) project. At the beginning an analysis was conducted to define the needs of the ones lecturing/training/teaching and personal features of the potential learners ("consumers"), their interests, motivation and language learning potential and eagerness to improve their language skills and their professional conversation abilities. As in a regular learning situation there is a face to face communication between teacher and student also in the non-physical situation of an online learning program.

Tick-Tack has broken these regular roles already with its pioneering approach and ECLT followed the principles of the constructivist theory for knowledge acquisition and the guidelines/evaluation criteria for good educational web based materials [6]. The focus is on real-life situations providing a vocationally oriented concept supported with intercultural aspects related to the addressed situations. The features of the learning plans for foreign language learning (workplace-related) at target schools were also taken into account to make the course applicable for integration into the curriculum.

The course designed within the project itself based on revised cognitive taxonomy (Anderson/Karthwohl) is split up into six modules that focus on various aspects of the data gathered on the national cuisine of all the partner countries. The modules are: Introduction, Geography, Culinary details, Intercultural relevant information, Gastronomic advice and Cross country comparison. The exercises designed for the modules take the students through the cognition ladder (remember, understand/apply, analyse, evaluate, create) and include numerous tasks based on excerpts taken from the various national cuisines. Tasks and exercises include reading/listening comprehension, gap fills, substitution as well as creative tasks.

6. Course piloting and trainer training

The course is presently being piloted at the partner institutions both at the vocational level as well as higher education level. After piloting and amending the course will be integrated/adapted into the existing curriculum for hospitality studies. Again it must be underlined that above course was just designed to test the usability of the data gathered

and that the easy access to the database via electronical devices and the transfer of existing software products to modern communication systems such as smart-phones with apps and training DVDs will enable educators and trainers to exploit the data gathered in innovative ways to better facilitate teaching/learning.

In the situation of an on-the-job learning process which is especially intended when working in the hospitality industry, it is not possible to have undisturbed learning opportunities. Learning happens in situations while taking orders from the guests and trying to explain cultural specifics of dishes or eating habits as well as the structure of typical menus. The role of the technical partners is especially to ensure the implementation of glossaries and explanations together with pictures produced by the enterprises/users themselves onto the hand held devices thereby enhancing the on-the-job learning process.

These outputs will be integrated into DVD software and simultaneously, in cooperation with partners from the industry, prototype apps will be designed for the use on modern communication devices through partnership with software engineering enterprise which has developed ordering devices for the restaurant use, which is an important and integrated part of the project.

The potential effectiveness of different solutions in relation to the needs of teachers in the hospitality and catering fields and how far they do or could exploit successfully the latest advances in technology and in digital communication play a key part in developing a teacher/trainer training course that would seek to obtain first-hand experience from teachers on the programs that they use and have found the most valuable, why they have adopted them in preference to others, what level of motivation they give to their students and how they use them in class.

Training teachers/trainers in the use of the new product will definitely produce the multiplicative effect and ensure that the outcome of the project is not a dead end story but a basis for new projects and they will carry on the development of learning materials for the hospitality industry in the future.

Finally, these outcomes are widely disseminated in seminars, workshops and presentations at educational institutions and fair with the aim of increasing awareness and raising interest in the project. The use of the apps is to be piloted in real praxis at associated partner restaurants. The presentation and publication of this paper itself is an example of one of the various avenues that could be employed in reaching a wider audience.

Conclusions

The project is essentially aimed at reducing barriers to work mobility, increasing international understanding and cooperation, supporting a flexible delivery mode, modern learning requirements with attractive and interactive e-learning mate-

rials. As its short term objectives it plans to:

1) increase language and digital skills of formal/informal learners;
2) update/adapt existing language learning software to innovate use in communication and ordering devices;
3) reduce barriers in language learning by offering an integrated approach to language and intercultural training, attractive and interactive e-learning materials supported by pictures;
4) arouse proudness of own culture and traditions.

The project closes the gap between various levels of vocational training which increases chances to participate in the much diversified field of tourism. Language skills are one of the most important factors for success in tourism for those who will work in services and to arouse the curiosity for learning and understanding new cultures. In the long term integrating partners from the EU helps to bring European members together even closer and in terms of tourism this integration of the regions will bring added value and welfare.

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