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Infographics and schemes in foreign language classes

Nowadays due to usage of websites and social networks there is a range of different kinds of visual content. It is used productively to collapse voluminous textual information into smaller visual objects and also to attract users' attention. It is proved, that visuals are perceived more successfully, then texts due to the brain ability to operate visual information. According to David Hyerle early 90% of information, received by brain, is visual [1]. Neurons responsible for visual activity take up approximately 30% of our total grey matter, while neurons for touch & hearing only 8% & 3% [3]. Also we need to mention that visual aids in classrooms improve learning by up to 400% [2].

Visual content is all the visual information that accompanies a text: photos, drawings, diagrams, videos, graphic design, logos etc. [4].

The use of visual content is relevant in foreign language classes, especially, teaching LSP and LAP (language for specific or academic purpose). The teaching objectives of the foreign language include the ability to communicate in the language of learning verbally and in writing on scientific issues in higher education, in other words, reading, writing, analyzing sources of information, perceiving audio texts, answering questions verbally and in writing, and being able to prepare small monologues and presentations.

From the visual content mentioned above, we need to single out schemes, diagrams and infographics as those which have a great potential in foreign language teaching.

Schemes and diagrams. Building read-through schemes develops the ability to reduce information and highlight the most important information blocks. Independent

creation of visual material helps students to understand the structure of textual material and prepares them for the more difficult stage - the perception of audiotext. Deploying a schema into text develops the ability to generate microtexts using specific syntactic constructs. For example, at the stage of studying the first scientific texts (beginning of the second semester of the preparatory department) students are tasked to create a scheme on the text and then read a similar scheme created on the basis of another text.

Infographics (the term is formed of two words information and graphics - images) - images with a small amount of text illustrating a certain topic. As soon as vocabulary in the lessons of the LAP / LSP contains a variety of abstract lexical units, it is necessary to involve as many visual images as possible at the stage of vocabulary consolidation. There is a large amount of infographics on the internet. The main feature of the infographic is the optional use of text, but the obligation to use pictures, which should make the main meaning clear.

The definition of infographics is presented by Mark Smiciklas: "a visualization of data or ideas that tries to convey complex information to an audience in a manner that can be quickly consumed and easily understood" [3: 5].

Ready-made infographics can be used as training material. There is also the possibility of creating your own infographics, which can be both a stage of preparation for the lesson for the teacher and a task for the students' homework. Any image editor or pre-made websites and services might be used to choose images or own pictures could be selected.

1. Canva.com is a website which allows to create infographics.
2. Piktochart.com is a service that transforms information into visual stories. It is the easiest to use. The benefits include the offline infographics setting, a large selection of design themes and the ability to overlay a logo.
3. Creately.com - a tool that makes it easy to create diagrams. You can choose the appropriate chart and overlay it to get a completely new chart or graph.
4. Infogr.am - a new program that actively introduces incredible capabilities. Great for creating free charts and infographics.

The peculiarity of the infographics is informative images, the decryption of which does not require the presence of textual information nearby. Often the infographics also contains numbers.

The use of infographics is most effective at the stage of repetition and consolidation of lexical material and syntactic constructions, since students need to reproduce the learned lexical units and draw them into coherent text.

It is productive to use infographics to study material which contains a wide range of numbers or a voluminous lexical group.

For example, infographic elements can be used to teach body parts and internal organs in the biology section (for the medical profile), when comparing economies of different countries (for the economic profile).

In conclusion, the use of visual content in foreign language classes has great potential and is an effective method of input, consolidation and validation of the material studied.

References:

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