

Useful Online Resources and Educational Tools for Teaching English for Tourism and Hospitality

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Abstract - Tourism is a branch of economy with the vigorous growth whose influence penetrates society, politics, culture and the most importantly the economy. Approximately 100 million employees are estimated to work in the modern leisure and experience industry. Foreign languages competence is one of the key skills in this industry. The rapid advancement of technology has both influenced language learning and customers experience in tourism industry. This paper aims to discuss the influence of technology on these two aspects in courses for English for Tourism and Hospitality. Needs analyses conducted in this sector have proven and highlighted the importance of domain content digital genres in English for Specific Purposes. Hence, the focus of this paper will be placed on useful online resources and educational tools that can be used in English Language Teaching in the field of Tourism and Hospitality. Online resources in English that will be discussed are: Booking.com, Travel Agencies Websites and National Geographic Short Videos while online educational tools are: Social Networks (Facebook), Padlet and Duolingo. The engagement of these online resources and tools should enable Tourism English attendees during their course to learn to navigate and perform in digital environment and to use these resources and tools at their future job posts.

Keywords: *tourism, hospitality, English for Specific Purposes, English for Tourism and Hospitality, online resources, educational tools, digital genres*

I. INTRODUCTION

The process and the outcome of a needs analysis is as relevant for English for Tourism and Hospitality (ETH) as it is for any other branch of English for Specific Purposes branch (Hutchinson & Waters, 1996; Robinson, 1991; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Benesch, 2001; Bruce, 2011;) especially when it comes to the curriculum development (Richards, 2001; Flowerdew, 2013; Adorjan, 2013). This academic year (2016/2017) the Department of Tourism and Hospitality was founded at the Faculty of Business Economics at Sinergija University in Bijeljina, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The students of this department have four English language courses during their studies, one every year. First two years they attend General English courses while during the third and fourth year they are expected to grasp the knowledge and skills from two ESP courses, more precisely English for Tourism and Hospitality courses. In the process of designing the curriculum for these courses blended-learning environment methodology was taken into account (Arney, 2015) since the digital environment is the environment that we spend a vast amount

of our personal and working time in (Nikolić & Dabić, 2016). As a consequence, certain digital genres specific for each job position should be taken into account when designing a new curriculum (Pérez-Llantada Auría, 2001). Certain digital resources and genres are prone to be used on daily basis by tourist graduates at their potential future posts whether in their country language or in a foreign language and as such they should be an important component of ETH curriculum (Adorjan, 2013). This is significant due to the fact that the thinking that applies to life outside school is characterized by a series of transfer opportunities rather than as a series of recall assignments to be done (Nikolić & Dabić, 2016). This methodology also provokes higher-order thinking skills in both traditional and digital context (Nikolić & Dabić, 2016). The engagement of higher-order thinking skills has been one of imperatives in contemporary trends in education from early childhood (Rajović, 2012) throughout the whole educational process (Collins, 2014). More precisely, the aim is to provide functional knowledge for the students after they make the transfer from educational into working environment. Furthermore it is relevant to point out that the customer's experience is being at the heart of digital transformation (Forrest, 2015) and that today we teach the generations of digital natives (Prensky, 2010).

The paper has the aim to present how certain online resources and tools engaged in the teaching process in ETH courses can prepare the students for their future job posts in tourism industry. The employment of these resources and tools is expected to spur students' creativity and engage higher-order thinking skills while at the same time focuses on the target communicative events.

II TARGET KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND FUNCTIONS IN TOURISM ENGLISH

Tourism is not a recent phenomenon, though it is now considered as an emerging economic activity in many developing countries. The first definition of tourism goes back to the beginning of the nineteenth century. In 1910, an Australian economist defined tourism as "*bob total operators, mainly of an economic nature, which directly relate to the entry, stay and movement of foreigners inside and outside a certain country, city or region.*" (Singh, 2008:228). Today, tourism is not only a phenomenon but also a huge industry in development (Bekri, 2012). Accordingly, there are many researchers that have conducted the needs analysis of the

students and employees in the field of Tourism and Hospitality English. However, this paper will focus to the ones that we find relevant for this paper (Adorjan, 2013; Bekri, 2012; Choi, 2010; Tonić, 2010; Prachanant, 2012) that can assist on discussing the bridge between the usage of certain online resources in teaching English and their application in future professional environment. In this section we will discuss, the most common themes in tourism and hospitality that are used as the basis of further syllabus creation of Tourism English courses, the most frequent functions expected by the employees in this area and the demands in the context of language skills.

Recently there has been growing interests in examining subject areas and research trends in the hospitality and tourism fields (Yulan, Tseng, & Chan, 2014; Tazim & Robinson, 2009). Defining the content for the syllabus of a Tourism English course, Adorjan (2013:167) sigled out following subfields of tourism: Basic terms of tourism, Commercial enterprises (e.g. Disneyland), Ecotourism, Travelling, Accommodation, Cultural, Educational tours, Business tourism, Active tourism, The dark side of tourism (e.g. terror and catastrophe tourism), City tours and Festivals/Food. However, each ESP teacher should consult domain content expert at the department where they teach ETH course in order to define the content the addresses the students' needs at that department (Jordan, 1997).

Since communication presents a vital component in tourism industry it is important to mention the notions of language and communication in Business English that Dudley-Evans and St John (1998: 61) discuss under four categories: (a) discourse community, (b) business genres, (c) key communicative events and (d) functions, grammar and lexis. In this paper, we will focus only on the last category (functions, grammar and lexis). Functions that emerged as the most relevant for future employees in tourism industry are: giving information, providing services and offering help (Prachanant, 2012:121; Bekri, 2012). When fluency and accuracy are taken into account, domain experts and learners opt predominantly for fluency. Learners' attitude towards grammar skills is that they find them the least important in ETH while domain experts estimate they would like to improve on a medium, rather than on a high level (Tonić, 2010:63).

Although whole language approach to language teaching has been emphasised for quite some time (Schurr, Thomason, & Thomason, 1995) where skills should be taught holistically, in many cases there is the need to investigate on the priorities of the needs separately as well as the problems students encounter within them. Since this paper enquires the needs of ETH students, certain findings elaborating on the priority given to language skills and problems students and employees encounter within them should be discussed. When the tourism employees were asked to rate their need for English language skills in operating their work, they rated all macro four language skills as important. Considering the priority the respondents gave to each skill separately, it was found that speaking was considered the most important for their work ($x = 4.46$, S.D. = 1.06), followed by listening ($x = 4.38$, S.D. = 1.41), reading ($x = 3.87$, S.D. = 1.64) and writing ($x = 3.68$, S.D. = 1.57) (Masoumpanah & Tahririan, 2013:8;

Prachanant, 2012:120). Prachanant (2012) further investigated the problems the respondents encounter within all four skills respectively. *Understanding foreign english accents* was marked as the problem most frequently encountered by the employees in listening. Regarding speaking, the respondents marked *using inappropriate words and expressions* while for reading *having inadequate vocabulary in reading* emerged as the most common problem. In the end, the respondents reported on *lacking the grammar knowledge* as the greatest problem within this skill (Prachanant, 2012) while their managers saw filling out certain forms or applications as important writing skill for their employees (Masoumpanah & Tahririan, 2013).

III THE EMPLOYMENT OF ONLINE RESOURCES AND TOOLS IN TOURISM ENGLISH

The impact of Digital Era is not only visible on digital natives generations (Prensky, 2010) but also on people of all ages. Many target customers in tourism industry are addicted to the internet and spend hours on various devices where they can explore their wants and desires. As a director at a US-based insurance enterprise said (Forrest, 2015:1): *“Digital experience is a top priority for the company in terms of resource allocation. . . . It affects prospect and customer experiences, and we want to improve both.”* One of the most significant findings of this report is that: *“the customer experience is at the heart of digital transformation”* (Forrest, 2015:2). Accordingly, it is expected of employees in tourism industry to work in a multimedia-driven environment as most of the communicative situations, written and oral, contain some technological features (Adorjan, 2013; Choi, 2010). Therefore, incorporating purposeful online resources as a supplement to the textbook is more than natural in a course of ETH (Adorjan, 2013; Nikolić & Dabić, 2016; Pérez-Llantada Auria, 2001). Moreover, the usage of purposeful online resources and tools can enable simulations of working tasks and that is highly ranked in the field of Business English. (Ellis & Johnson, 1994; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998).

Hence, this paper has the aim to present chosen online resources and tools that can address the needs of Tourism English students placing them in a multimedia-driven environment to perform working tasks. Using authentic material is highly recommendable in ESP teaching since the conducted researches have shown that authenticity in foreign language education improves students' acquisition of foreign language skills and in this case digital genres (Field, 1998; Herron, Morris, Secules, & Curtis, 1995). First, online resources will be presented and afterwards online educational tools. Online resources that are going to be presented in educational context are: Booking.com, Travel agencies' websites and National Geographic Short Videos.

A. *Booking.com*

Booking.com is an online accommodation booking website that was started as a small start-up in 1996, in Amsterdam, Netherlands and since 2005 it is owned and operated by United States-based Priceline. Booking.com offers 1,000,000 properties globally under contract while more than 900,000 room nights reservations are made each

day. Booking.com is available in more than 41 languages (About Booking.com, 2005). The significance of research on online booking tools is immense (Shanshan , Lawb, & Buhalisc, 2013). Regarding teaching aspect of Booking.com in ETH classroom, its benefits are manifold and interdisciplinary. First, students can acquire a great deal of domain content expressions and words that can be useful in giving information on the properties their potential clients are interested in (eg. types of accommodation, property features, room features/facilities, location features and cultural and historical attractions). Second, the reviews provided by guests present a valuable source of expressions and impressions of the very attendees/guests. These reviews are two-dimensional because they can provide the students with a bountiful of description expressions and because they can gather the impressions of the guests that have already been there and more personal perspective to the potential future clients. Lastly, students may use the acquired vocabulary and phrases to simulate in pair or group work the very process of booking in more than one language.

B. Travel Agencies' Websites

Travel agencies' websites are useful because they also present in English a very organized and clear way of categorizing services and offers of typical and atypical agencies. For example, the most common menu categories of touristic websites in our region are: winter 2016/2017, summer, a cruise, bus tours, Europe tours, Intercontinental travels, Wellness and Spa, tickets, fairs, special deals (<http://www.kontiki.rs/>) while popular foreign travel agencies' website are quite different to our standards. For example, some websites have a search bar that helps clients to, on the basis of set parameters, choose a perfect holiday (e.g. <https://www.homeaway.com/>). Through the perspective of these websites students can (1) grasp the way how services and offers are organized in menu bar what can help them to be efficient in providing information to clients; (2) acquire key vocabulary and (3) make a travel website as a part of an assigned project by their ESP teacher or as a team project with domain expert professors. What is more, the analyses of foreign travel websites can broaden students' horizon for their future business.

C. National Short Videos

Living in the Digital Era we have been accustomed to receiving various messages in video format: commercial, personal, entertaining, educational and many others (Hockly, Dudeney, & Pergun, 2013; Prensky, 2010). Students majoring in Tourism and Hospitality are expected to communicate in English efficiently while they are also supposed to become experts in geography and tourism (Frydrychova Klimova & Kacetl, 2012). Therefore, videos reports on the following topics can be more than useful as informative input for this group of students: European cities and regions, history and tradition of different countries, videos on local people recommending local sights, attractions, domestic cuisine specialties, pubs, galleries etc. (Frydrychova Klimova & Kacetl, 2012:47). Although there is a pool of travel videos, it

is recommendable to use the ones that have been known of excellent quality and reputation. For that reason, National Geographic videos on travel topics were chosen (National Geographic , 1997). Furthermore, they have two more advantages: they are not too long (usually between two and five minutes) and they mostly offer, next to the video) a summary of the video and extra links for more information on the video directors and their work.

As blended-learning has been making its way into educational institution worldwide (Arney, 2015) it is not surprising the focus that has been placed on online educational tools. Since 2007 Jane Hart has yearly published the Top 100 Tools for Learning compiled from the votes of learning professionals worldwide (Hart, 2007). The online tools that are going to be discussed are: Social Networks (Facebook), Padlet and Duolingo. Facebook takes the seventh place on Jane's list, Padlet takes the thirty-fifth place while Duolingo takes seventy-fourth place and it has emerged in this list in 2016.

D. Facebook

Although there are many social networks, Facebook is chosen because it is most commonly used among both younger and older population in Bosnia and Herzegovina. If Facebook is considered in the aspect of tourism and hospitality field (Facebook Business, 2004; Facebook, 2004), ETH learning outcomes and the end-of users (i.e. potential clients that should be addressed via Facebook), it can be concluded it is a valuable tool for at least three purposes: (1) travel agency/hotel marketing, (2) destination promotions and (3) a resourceful tool for students to learn from. The analysis of already existing Travel Agencies Facebook pages can be used as models for creating your own or an imaginary one as a project assigned to students. In this manner, they can practice key vocabulary and structures and get equipped to use this knowledge and skills when an opportunity arises at their future job posts

E. Padlet

Padlet is a virtual wall that enables people to express their thoughts on various topics individually or collaboratively. It functions as an online sheet of paper where people can put any content (e.g. images, audio, videos, documents, text) anywhere on the page from any device. It can serve both educational (Padlet Backpack, 2012; Karpuk, 2012) and business purposes (Padlet Briefcase, 2012). The usefulness of this tool in ETH courses is manifold. First, it can be used for presentation of places / sights / restaurants / hotels / historical places / beaches etc that are worth visiting (e.g. Padlet Gallery, 2016). Second, this bunch of offers can be divided into categories. Third, the teacher can assign students a wall with specific topic as a kind of collaborative project. Padlet can be connected to other online tools. As Facebook has been discussed earlier, it can be the tool merged with Padlet in many ways. For instance, students can promote a new destination and post it to their virtual Travel Agency Facebook Page.

F. Duolingo

The last online tool, but not the least, Duolingo (Ahn & Hacker, 2011), is rather different from previous two tools because it is a free online tool, more precisely a language-learning platform that includes language-learning website and app. Duolingo has highly interactive features, engaging all four language skills equally and it is data-driven platform which means it tracks the student's progress and inform them on their weak points. Besides that, it offers two more services: Duolingo Test Center (Duolingo Test Centre, 2014) and Duolingo for Schools (Duolingo for Schools, 2015). Duolingo Test Centre offers certificated testing system that is connected to LinkedIn profiles. Duolingo for Schools allows the teacher to create an online classroom, to invite students via link, to assign them modules to work on and to track their progress. How this tool can be used in ETH context? Firstly, the concept of multilingualism in tourism industry has to be introduced (Duchene, 2009). Most of the tourism industry is primarily focused on English language as an imperative in tourism service jobs. However, apart from English, competence in more than one language (multilingualism) is also significant. For example, the domain expert needs analysis in Slovenian tourism has revealed that besides English, German and Italian are also important due to the fact that the majority of guests that Slovenia receives speak German and Italian (Tonić, 2010). Duolingo can enable students to learn other target languages via English. By learning a new language/s they revise English and work on the accuracy and fluency. Furthermore, Duolingo Test Centre gives the students opportunity to earn certificates proving their language proficiency that can be added to their LinkedIn profile or CV.

IV CONCLUSION

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from this paper regarding the needs of ETH students and the teaching environment they are supposed to learn and work in. First, being a professional in tourism industry nowadays means a complex set of competencies and skills, interdisciplinary in nature. Second, after graduation the students are expecting to navigate and work in digital environment where their customers find most of the information before contacting them. This implies the necessity of creating digital teaching environment and assessment an essential component of ETH course. Third, the engagement of online resources and tools can guide and teach students to fulfil the functions that emerged in needs analysis: giving information, providing services and offering help. Furthermore, it can help students to hone all four language skills and to overcome the problems they mentioned to encounter within them: understanding foreign English accents, using inappropriate words and expressions, having inadequate vocabulary in reading and lacking grammar knowledge. Fourth, working with authentic online material students can simulate target professional situations. Besides that, most of the resources and tools can be used by ESP teachers and domain content professors to assign students projects where they can collaborate to create and run a virtual Travel Agency using online tools and in that manner

and activate higher-order thinking skills, especially the highest level – creativity. Finally, the placement of students in their natural habitat (digital environment) spurs creativity and motivation, boosts their confidence and creates pleasurable working atmosphere.

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