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EUROMOBIL – A Multimedia Language Learning Programme promoting Student Mobility

Abstract

Student mobility has become one of the principles in higher education and is supported by several EU programmes and bilateral contracts between educational institutions. Students spending a short period abroad, however, are often lacking in preparation required for the host country, for example information about the country and also communicative skills. EUROMOBIL is a hybrid multimedia language learning and information programme on CD-ROM with links to the web, promoting student mobility. It contains information about the target countries: the United Kingdom, Germany, Finland, and Hungary, as well as exercises for improving language skills needed in different communicative situations in the target languages: English, German, Finnish and Hungarian. Designing computer based materials for communication training on an international scale is a challenge to language teachers, demanding new skills not only in handling the technical and design aspects of the new information and communication technologies (ICT), but also in terms of administration and cooperation between teachers from other cultures and professionals from other fields, such as programmers. New media have become increasingly important in language teaching and learning, and EUROMOBIL aims to meet the needs of modern language learning.

1. Introduction

Student mobility has already become reality in the united Europe. It is supported by numerous EU-programmes and bilateral contracts between educational institutions (Baumgratz-Gangl 1989). Students studying for a short period abroad, however, often lack preparation, and foreign language teaching at host universities is mostly planned for full-time students and not for exchange students (Floor 1991, Wiemer & Eggers & Neuf 1997). There

is, however, a growing number of studies concerning the needs of exchange students, as well as studies about genres and cultural differences, which can be utilised for language courses and materials design (Ehlich 1999, Graefen 1997 and 1999, Grütz, D. 1995, Mauranen & Markkanen 1994, Schlabach 1999 and 2000, Wiemer 1999, Wiemer & Müller-Küppers & Eggers 1998, Ylönen 1994).

The more students know in advance about the language and culture of their host country, the more successful their short stay abroad is likely to be. Multimedia learning material for self-study provides optimal possibilities of preparation, both active and individual, for studying abroad. The EUROMOBIL project was planned to produce a multimedia language and information programme for CD-ROM with links to the web to promote student mobility. In the following, a general description of the project will first be given, followed by detailed examples from the Finnish and the Hungarian parts of the programme. In addition, advantages and problems in international projects supported by the EU commission will be discussed.

2. The EUROMOBIL Project

EUROMOBIL is a project promoting student mobility, supported by the European Commission programme Socrates/Lingua D – Lingua 2. The project is running for 3 years (1st December 1999 to 1st December 2002). It is coordinated by the Centre for Applied Language Studies at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. The project partners are the Institute for Intercultural Communication e.V. Berlin (Germany), the Language Institute of the Medical Faculty at the University of Pécs (Hungary), and the Institute for Germanic Studies at the University of Bristol (UK). More detailed information about the project can be found on the project website at www.euro-mobil.org.

The **aim** of the project is to produce a multimedia language learning and information programme for CD-ROM with web links so exchange students can improve their communicative skills in preparation for studying in Great Britain, Germany, Finland and Hungary. The programme provides information about the exchange universities, countries and cultures as well as exercises for improving the language skills needed in different communicative situations in the target language.

The contents and structure of the EUROMOBIL programme were developed on the basis of a **needs analysis**. With the help of a questionnaire, information was gathered about the background of exchange students and their skills in the target language as well as about problems in studying and in everyday and leisure situations. According to the requirements, all students have to study in the target language at British or German universities whereas they do not need to know any Finnish or Hungarian in order to study in Finland or Hungary as courses in English are offered for international students. Nevertheless, exchange students are interested in the language of their host country, and, for example, 90 % of the exchange students in Jyväskylä attend Finnish courses for beginners offered by the university language centre. Basic skills in the target language improve cultural knowledge as well, and thus naturally help the student to better deal with everyday and study situations. Consequently, the EUROMOBIL programme is designed for advanced learners of English and German, on the one hand, and for beginners in Finnish and Hungarian, on the other. Accordingly, the contents of the programme differ as well. With the English and German EUROMOBIL language course learners can practise study-related communicative skills in the following situations: *student advice, lecture, seminar, and exam*. In contrast, the Finnish and Hungarian programmes also include everyday situations: *study, library/travel book HU, services, and leisure*. The difference in the second unit, *library vs. travel book Hungary*, results again from the findings of the needs analysis. While exchange students in Finland mentioned problems in using the library, those in Hungary emphasised language needed for making use of the great travelling possibilities of their host country.

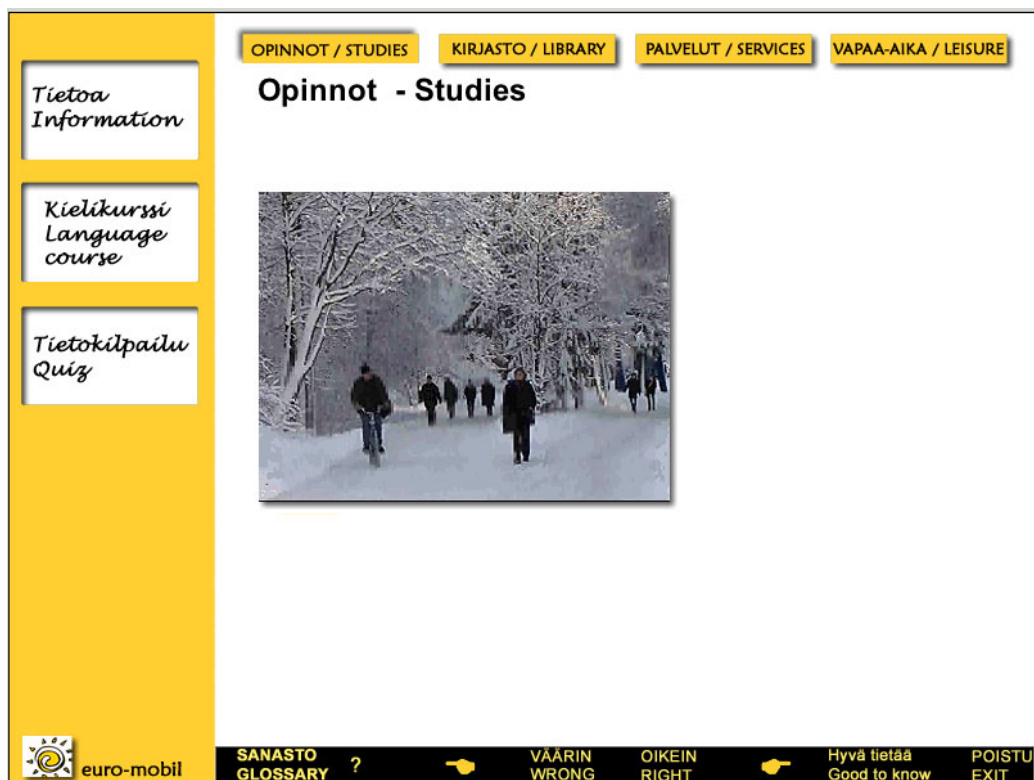
As mentioned above, the programme contains two principal parts: the language learning and the information part. The **Language learning programme** contains the *Language course* with tasks and exercises (partly located on the EUROMOBIL website), a *Glossary*, and a section called *Good to know* with information on *Intercultural aspects* and *Language knowledge* such as *Grammar* and *Phonetics*. In the English and German programme, however, the emphasis of the *Good to know* section is on intercultural and informational aspects. This section contains videos about the partner universities and a *Quiz* about Great Britain and Germany, respectively. The structure of the Finnish and Hungarian programmes is more integrated: the four themes (*study, library/travel book HU, services, and leisure*) are closely linked with the activities (an *Information* video, the *Language course*, and the *Quiz*, see picture 1).

The *Information* programme is partly on the CD-ROM and partly in the Internet. Several links from the CD-ROM lead to the Web, and one of these, the EUROMOBIL website link, is found on the main menu and is thus available all the time. On the project website, students will find a large list of links with information, for example, about the universities, accommodation and health insurance, student parties or cinema programmes.

The *Forum* of the project is open for discussion on all questions relating to EUROMOBIL, and some of the exercises of the Language course that do not have a right/wrong answer option can also be discussed here. EUROMOBIL can thus be called a hybrid multimedia language learning and information programme for CD-ROM and also for the web.

In the following, some examples from the Finnish and Hungarian parts will be given to help the reader to envision the programme.

3. The Finnish EUROMOBIL Programme



Picture 1. Structure of the Finnish EUROMOBIL programme.

As mentioned above, the target groups of the EUROMOBIL programme are somewhat different for England and Germany on the one hand, and for Finland and Hungary on the other. It could almost be said that the Finnish and the Hungarian parts of the EUROMOBIL programme have two target groups, which are somewhat different from each other. On the one hand, the information section aims at providing relevant information about studying at Finnish / Hungarian universities as well as introducing everyday student life in Finland / Hungary, and is thus directed to all foreign university students coming to these countries. The language learning section, on the other hand, is mainly aimed at beginner learners of Finnish / Hungarian. This section of the programme is, however, also planned to include the possibility of going deeper into the subject, and could therefore be useful for advanced learners of Finnish / Hungarian as well.

The Finnish EUROMOBIL programme, as stated above, consists of four themes (*study, library, services and leisure*) linked with studying at a Finnish university. The substance of each thematic unit could be divided into six sections: *Information, Language course, Quiz, Internet (the project website), Glossary, and "Good to know"*. (Picture 1) It should be noticed here, however, that these sections are not to be seen as separate but rather as a texture consisting of overlapping units. This texture will be discussed in more detail below. The structure will be illustrated by examples from the thematic unit *Study*.

The *Information* section is to be regarded as the basis on which the substance of each thematic unit is founded. *Information* comprises of a video tape on the respective theme, including dialogues for common communication situations, such as inquiring where a place is or asking about the time (see Example 1). In addition, the video is accompanied with a transcript, both in Finnish and in English. The information given in the text will be completed by means of Internet links.

Example 1

Mitä kello on?

- Anteeks... mitä kello on?
- Kello on kahdeksan.
- Missä kaikki on?
- Ää.. luento alkaa vasta kello kahdeksan viisitoista.
- Joo.. Kiitos

What time is it?

- Excuse me, what's the time?
- Eight o' clock.
- Where is everybody?
- The lecture starts at eight fifteen.
- Ahaa! Thank you.

The *Language course* introduces a number of important vocabulary items (e.g., personal pronouns, basic verbs, greetings, foods, words for weather, articles of clothing, numbers, expressions of time, the days of the week, months, seasons, colours), which a student is likely to encounter when living in Finland. On the basis of the findings of the needs analysis, it was decided to include both written and spoken language forms of the pronouns and numbers, which clearly differ from each other in Finnish and may cause confusion among foreigners. Parts of the exercises are based on the scripts of the *Information* videos. The vocabulary of each theme is practised in 2 – 4 tasks. In the first of these, the vocabulary is introduced (written and spoken) and then practiced in the following tasks. In the *Library* unit, for example, the days of the week are first introduced with the help of a calendar and then practised on the basis of sentences and a table of opening hours in the information video. The final exercise concerns the calendar theme once again.

The dialogues on the *Information* videos are also used as a basis for the exercises. Depending on the dialogue, these exercises can concern its information content, situational language use, and/or grammatical structures. For example, the aim of the first dialogue-based task of the *Library* unit (see Example 2 for the dialogue and Exercise types 1, 2 and 3) is revision, the second task tests greetings and polite forms of address, and the third acquaints the student with the meaning of a number of relevant words. Instructions to all exercises are given both in Finnish and in English.

Example 2

Lainaustiskillä

At the circulation service desk

(O/S = opiskelija/student, V/L = virkailija/librarian)

O: Hei	S: Hi!
V: [Hei]*	L: [Hello!]
O: Mä haluaisin lainata nämä kirjat.	S: I would like to borrow these books.
V: Yhym... Oliko sulla kirjastokortti mukana?	L: Uh-hm...Do you have your library card with you?
O: Joo... [Noin ole hyvä.]	S: Yeah...[Here you are.]
V: [Kiitos.] Laina-aika on kaksi viikkoa ja tässä on eräpäivä.	L: [Thank you.] The loan period is two weeks and here is the due date.
O: [Hyvä], kiitos.	S: [Good], thank you.
V: Kiitos.	L: Thank you.

O: Hei!
V: [Hei!]

S: Bye!
L: [Bye!]

*The function of the brackets will be explained in connection with Exercise type 2.

Exercise type 1 (listening comprehension):

“Kuuntele dialogi ja vastaa kysymyksiin.”

“Listen to the dialogue and answer the question.”

Mitä virkailija kysyy opiskelijalta ensiksi?

What does the librarian ask the student first?

- a) Saanko sinun kirjastokortin?
- b) Oliko sulla kirjastokortti mukana?
- c) Onko tämä sinun kirjastokortti?

- a) May I have your library card?
- b) Do you have your library card with you?
- c) Is this your library card?

Exercise type 2 (practising greetings):

“Täydennä keskustelu kuulemasi perusteella.”

“Complete the dialogue according to what you hear.”

Expressions in the brackets are missing from the dialogue (see Example 2). The student’s task is to listen to the dialogue and fill in the missing information by choosing the correct alternative.

Exercise type 3 (vocabulary relevant to a library):

“Mitä seuraavien lauseiden **lihavoidut** sanat tarkoittavat? Valitse oikea vaihtoehto.”

“What **do** the words in **bold** mean? Choose the correct option.”

2. “**Kotilainaan** saa neljäksi viikoksi”

- a) returning of a book
- b) borrowing of a book
- c) reading of a book

The purpose of the *Quiz* is to acquaint the student with Finnish geography as well as some special characteristics of Finnish culture (“Landeskunde”). The quiz in each unit consists of 12 questions that are more or less linked with the contents of the unit. One or two questions even refer to the information presented in the information video. The questions are traditional multiple-choice questions, but when the learner chooses the

correct alternative, a complementary, often illustrated explanation appears on the screen. These explanations will eventually be linked to websites that offer additional information about the topic.

As the main target group of the EUROMOBIL CD-ROM is learners with no previous knowledge of Finnish, sections that contain a lot of text will be supplied with an alphabetical Finnish-English glossary. This concerns, in practice, texts and dialogues included in the *Information* video and part of the exercises in the *Language course*.

Good to Know forms a kind of background archive from where also more advanced learners can find additional information. This type of complementary material is going to be produced – when needed – as an additional support for information texts, dialogues, language course tasks and quiz questions. Additional information is mainly needed for phonetics, grammatical structures, and culture-specific issues. For example, the different cases of Finnish are introduced in connection with all the tasks, and a complete description of the case system and most frequently used cases will be placed under the *Good to Know* heading.

4. The Hungarian EUROMOBIL Programme

The needs analysis we made with the help of our Finnish partners was the starting point of our work. The Medical Faculty of Pécs University offers study programmes to students from other countries. Most of them come from Norway and Greece. We asked these students, who participate in the so-called English Programme, to fill in a questionnaire in which they were requested to answer, among others, the following questions (answers in brackets):

- What has surprised you most about the host country? (friendly and hospitable Hungarians, the exam period in the hot weather ...)
- What have you enjoyed most about the host country? (low cost of living, the pleasant climate, travelling, food and wine, women)
- What have you enjoyed least about the host country? (communication problems because Hungarians often don't speak other languages, bad service industry, bureaucracy ...)
- Have you had any difficulties in dealing with practical matters or getting to know the university? (health care services, housing, registration, ...)

- Did you get all the information you needed? If not, what extra information would you have liked to be given? (the city, housing, details about subjects, travelling ...)

These answers helped us to determine the structure of the CD-ROM, the final decision on which was made after discussions with our partners. The four main topics we agreed on are: *studies, travel book Hungary, services and leisure.*

In addition to providing a basic level Hungarian *Language course*, we give *information* on the above topics, highlighting features specific to our country and culture. When the materials were developed we had to consider several aspects which were new, compared to traditional material development processes. On the one hand, we had to work according to the requirements of the programmer. On the other, it was impossible, in the *Language course*, to apply the principle of linear progress typical of traditional language course books, as the user can enter the programme at any point. For this reason, the course is limited to situation specific phrases and vocabulary.

Grammatical and cultural details are listed under the heading *Good to know* on the CD-ROM (see above). A mini encyclopaedia can be found under the same heading. It contains information about university traditions (e.g. formal clothes are to be worn at oral examinations), about tipping in restaurants, about why church bells are rung not at noon but one hour earlier in one Hungarian town, etc.

As an example let us consider how the first topic, *Studies*, is built up: This unit introduces the user to the University of Pécs, its Medical Faculty and the curriculum, the examination system, and the library. There is an interview with a foreign doctor who graduated at this University, and a videotaped part of a Hungarian language class. Every video recording is accompanied by a Hungarian and an English transcript in which some keywords are marked. There are notes to these keywords in Hypertext -format (e.g., about the Hungarian language, national holidays, etc.).

In each unit, there will be exercises to help students gain more experience in language use in specific situations or to extend their vocabulary.

In the *Quiz* section new information is also introduced, in a somewhat lighter form. The following examples are from the *Studies* section (right answers **bold**):

How much do students have to pay for using the library?

- A HUF 100/book
- B It depends on the length of the book
- C **It's free**

What is the language of teaching at the Medical Faculty?

- A The mother tongue of the student
- B **English**
- C English or German

Which grade makes students the happiest?

- A **Five**
- B It depends on the subject
- C One

Providing additional information in the Internet is an essential part of the project, as it makes it possible to update information and offers more space for personal interests.

Designing CD-ROM exercises requires a new approach from language teachers. Visuals form an extremely important part of the exercises. At the same time, it is impossible to cover as many themes and skills within the framework of a multimedia language course as in more traditional course forms, and therefore some colleagues have suggested that an accompanying printed course book should also be published.

As the programme has not yet been completed, we will recognize possible mistakes only when the programmer is finished with his work and we will be able to check and test the materials.

The overall aim of support from the EU is to promote international cooperation, to help establish connections between institutions in different countries, to encourage people to learn about each other's culture and work. These aims are perfectly met in the EUROMOBIL-project.

5. Conclusions

At the moment of writing, the EUROMOBIL project is halfway through and our experiences from working together are mainly positive. Thanks to

the relatively small size of the project (four partner institutions, one from each country) and previous cooperation between the partners involved, work has been fruitful and interim products could have been developed within the planned deadlines. Still, time and resources seem to be the biggest problems, and sometimes they cause disagreement between the partners on the quantity and quality of the programme. Bureaucracy in the EU is also fairly extensive, and dealing with administrative matters takes up a lot of project time that could, instead, be used for working with contents, evaluation, and research. In addition, innovative material production based on ICT is expensive, and IT personnel – at least in our case - has to be employed with limited EU grants. One solution we found is connecting project work with education. The benefits of this connection are reciprocal: students learn about project work and new ICT, and the project benefits in terms of results produced with the help of students.

From the beginning, the programme was planned to be adaptable to other languages as well. The first project presentation in an international conference lead to the request from the audience to develop a Rumanian module of EUROMOBIL. This request can, in our opinion, be understood as an approval of the results produced so far. In addition, the potential new project partner has experience in computer aided translation and speech recognition techniques that could be included in the programme and thus bring new innovative aspects to the project. The next application rounds will show whether our plans will find the EU commission's approval, without which this kind of cooperation would not be possible.

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