

# O USO DE ESTRATÉGIAS DE APRENDIZAGEM EM ATIVIDADES EM INGLÊS INSTRUMENTAL

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## RESUMO

Este trabalho tem por objetivo descrever uma experiência de ensino de Língua Inglesa Instrumental, contemplando a produção de alunos (entre dezesseis e dezenove anos de idade) do segundo semestre do curso de Computação de uma Escola Federal do Rio Grande do Sul. Para que o projeto ocorresse, foi utilizado, como ferramenta de apoio, o *software Hot Potatoes* e seus cinco aplicativos, que resultaram na produção de um CD ROM com as atividades de cada aluno envolvido no projeto. Para tanto, utilizou-se teóricos como Carroll (1960) e Ellis (2000), Dudley-Evans (2001), Bell (2002), Fiorito (2005) e Harding (2007).

**Palavras-chave:** Motivação. Ensino-aprendizagem de língua estrangeira. Informática na educação.

## ABSTRACT

This paper has the goal to describe an Instrumental English teaching experience, regarding the production of students (between seventeen and nineteen years old) of the second semester of a Computing Course in a Federal School in Rio Grande do Sul. For the execution of the project, it was used a base tool, the software *Hot Potatoes* and its five applicative tools, which resulted in the production of a CD ROM with the activities of each student involved in the project. For this, it was used authors such as Carroll (1960), Ellis (2000), Dudley-Evans (2001), Bell (2002), Fiorito (2005) and Harding (2007).

**KEYWORDS:** Motivation. Foreign language teaching-learning. Computing in education.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This paper will report an experience working with the free software *Hot Potatoes* with students of a Computing Course who were studying English in a Federal School, in Rio Grande do Sul (RS).

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This work takes into account that social factors to do with the context of learning have an effect on how successful individual second language (L2) and foreign language (FL) learners are, and possibly on how interlanguage develops as well. It considers the psychological dimensions of difference, especially the affective factors such as learners' personalities can influence the degree of anxiety they experience and their preparedness to take risks in learning and using L2 and FL.

Learners' preferred ways of learning may influence their overall, orientation to the learning task and the kind of input they find it easier to work with (ELLIS, 2000). We will focus on two dimensions here – language aptitude and motivation – and also explore how differences in learning strategies can affect development.

But first, it is important to emphasize the profile of the students we are working with, the main goal of the subject they were taking and also to characterize the Instrumental Teaching in Brazil.

## **2 – THE STUDENTS' PROFILE**

The students involved in the subject and also in the project work were in the basic and pre-intermediate level of learning English as a foreign language. They were around seventeen and nineteen years old and had just entered university.

As they were students of a Computing Course, they were very interested in doing something practical in their subject (Instrumental English). So, the idea of using the free software (Hot Potatoes) to create activities sounded interesting to all of them.

After deciding participating of the activities, they started checking the tools of the software and using the vocabulary they learned in class in their drills, focusing the objective of the subject, that was read and understand different textual genres, written in English, related to the themes of knowledge in the area of technology and internet systems, using reading strategies to comprehend the technical vocabulary, idiomatic expressions and abbreviations used in the computing area.

## **3 – INSTRUMENTAL ENGLISH**

The Instrumental English is a reality in different graduation courses in Brazil, mainly because of their characteristics of teaching specific items to defined areas, besides developing the language related to the context according to specific skills (KADER, 2011).

The term, Instrumental English, is part of a movement in the area of teaching foreign languages, called Language for Specific Purposes (LSP), in which is inserted the teaching of any foreign language with focus on the specific needs of the learner, observing the use of the target-language to the development of communicative tasks.

Fonseca (2005) says that there are two important aspects of teaching Instrumental English: the focus on the learner and the change in the language approach, seeing it not just as a set of grammatical rules but as a set of functions, given birth to the definition of Instrumental English.

Kader (2011) in accordance to Hutchinson & Waters (1987) emphasizes that the teacher should analyze the needs of the learner and think exactly what this person will need to learn using the target language.

Fiorito (2005) establishes the differences between English for Specific Purposes (ESP) from English as a Second Language (ESL), reinforcing that the most important difference lies in the learners and their purposes for learning English. ESP students are usually adults who already have some acquaintance with English and are learning the language in order to communicate a set of professional skills and to perform particular job-related functions. An ESP program is therefore built on an assessment of purposes and needs and the functions for which English is required.

He emphasizes that ESP concentrates more on language in context than on teaching grammar and language structures. It covers subjects varying from accounting or computer science to tourism and business management, for example.

The ESP focal point is that English is not taught as a subject separated from the students' real world (or wishes); instead, it is integrated into a subject matter area important to the learners.

Fiorito (2005) asseverates that ESP combines subject matter and English language teaching. Such a combination is highly motivating because students are able to apply what they learn in their English classes to their main field of study, being able to use the vocabulary and structures that they learn in a meaningful context reinforcing what is taught and increasing their motivation.

Dudley-Evans (2001) defines that teaching and material of ESP are based on the results of a needs analysis. The researcher also establishes some key questions related to the topic, considering that nowadays many students can start to learn academic or vocational English at an earlier age or lower level of proficiency. They are:

What do students need to do with English?

Which of the skills do they need to master and how well?

Which genres do they need to master either for comprehension or production purposes?

Bell (2002) argues that the depth of knowledge of a subject matter that a teacher requires depends on a number of variables which include:

How much do the learners know about their specialism?

Are the students pre-experience or post-experience learners?

How specific and detailed are the language, skills and genres that the learners need to learn?

According to Bell (2002), although you do not need to be an expert in a specialist area, you do need to have some awareness and feel for a particular vocational area.

Harding (2007) stresses that the general skills that a general English teacher uses e.g. being communicative, using authentic materials and analyzing English in a practical way are also applicable to ESP.

Considering what was exposed, it was verified that we can define three distinctive traces for the Instrumental English Teaching: the analysis of the needs, the objectives clearly defined and the specific content of the classes. Such traces will be used in the process of creating the activities, by the students, involved in the project.

#### **4 LANGUAGE APTITUDE**

It has been suggested that people differ in the extent to which they possess a natural ability for learning a L2 as well as a FL. This ability, known as language aptitude, is believed to be in part related to general intelligence but also to be in part distinct.

John Carroll (1960) led to the identification of a number of components of language aptitude, these are: the phonetic coding skill, i.e. the condition to identify the sounds of a foreign language so that they can be remembered later, the grammatical sensitivity, i.e. the recognition of grammatical functions of words in sentences, the inductive language learning, i.e. the ability to identify patterns of correspondence and relations between form and meaning and rote learning, i.e. the skill to form and remember associations between stimuli (important in vocabulary study).

Research involving language aptitude has focused on whether and to what extent language aptitude is related to success in L2 and FL learning.

Most of the research on the relationship between language aptitude and L2 and FL proficiency took place in the 1950s and 1960s and the question that remains in these studies is *How does language aptitude relate to the processes of interlanguage development?*. One possibility, pointed out by Ellis (2000) may be implicated in different stages of processing. Phonetic coding ability would seem relevant to the processing of input, grammatical sensitivity and inductive language learning skill to the central processing stages involving interlanguage construction, and memory to the storage and access language.

In this study, we will focus on the grammatical sensitivity, the inductive language learning ability and rote learning ability. In the next section, we will discuss the role of motivation in the FL learning process.

## 5 MOTIVATION

Whereas language aptitude concerns the cognitive abilities that underlie successful L2 and FL acquisition, motivation involves the attitudes and affective states that influence the degree of effort that learners make to learn a L2 or a FL.

According to Ellis (2000, p. 75), there are several kinds of motivation, such as: instrumental, integrative, resultative and intrinsic.

When learners make efforts to learn a FL for some functional reason – to pass an examination, to get a better job, or to get a place at university, we have an instrumental motivation. In some learning contexts, this motivation seems to be the major force determining success in learning. For example, in settings where learners are motivated to learn a L2/ FL because it opens up educational and economic opportunities for them.

But when some learners choose to learn a particular language because they are interested in the people and cultures represented by the target language group, we have the integrative motivation.

The resultative motivation is considered the *result* of learning, that is, learners who experience success in learning may become more, or in some contexts, less motivated to learn.

In some learning situations, it may be learners' general reasons for learning a FL that are crucial in determining their motivation, indeed, it is possible that many learners do not hold distinct attitudes, positive or negative, towards the target language group, such is probably the case of intrinsic motivation.

Ellis (2000) emphasizes that motivation is clearly a highly complex phenomenon. These four types of motivation should be seen as complementary rather than as distinct and oppositional. Learners can be both integratively and instrumentally motivated at one and at the same time. Besides that, motivation can result from learning as well as a cause of it. Furthermore, motivation is dynamic in nature; it is not something that a learner has or does not have but rather something that varies from one moment to the next depending on the learning context or task.

This paper focuses on the instrumental and the resultative motivation, related to the objective of a group of students, involved in a class project work. This project offered them the opportunity to do something meaningful with their English knowledge, using the free software Hot Potatoes as a tool to create different activities in Computing Instrumental English.

## 6 THE SUITE HOT POTATOES

The *Hot Potatoes* suite includes six applications, enabling the user to create interactive multiple-choice, short-answer, jumbled-sentence, crossword, matching/ordering and gap-fill exercises for the World Wide Web. Hot Potatoes is freeware, and anybody may use it for any purpose or project the user likes.

This software was developed by the University of Victoria (by the team of CALL Laboratory Research Development), and it is available in Windows, Linux and Mac platforms. It is free since it is used for educational purpose as well as being allowed to be accessed on the web.

It is being used for Distance Education (EAD), as a support to the design of evaluation tools online.

This software comprises a package of five applicative tools (authorship tools) which enable the creation of dynamic activities through the insertion of texts, questions, answers, pictures, temporizer, among others, using Web pages.

These applicative tools are: *JCloze*, which creates exercises such as fill in the blanks; *JCross*, which creates crosswords; *JMatch*, which creates exercises such as match the columns with text or images; *JMix*, which creates exercises that enable learners to analyze sentences and *JQuiz*, which creates exercises of multiple choices.

It is possible to visualize a series of activities with the software which may be used to enrich the teaching-learning process, helping students and teachers in their challenges of everyday school life.

Besides that, it is important to mention that the use of the program get students and teachers closer to each others and to the digital environment, which contributes for the teaching quality.

This paper focuses on the contribution of this software for the development of the language learning-process, emphasizing the need to provide learners with real communicative and interactive experiences and production.

Considering what has already been mentioned, the software, associated to the language aptitude and motivation, constitute general factors that influence the rate and level of L2 achievement.

One possibility of this influence is that they affect the nature and the frequency with which individual learners use learning strategies. And to clarify their definition and offer better explanation, we will discuss about them in the next section.

## **7 – LEARNING STRATEGIES**

According to Ellis (2000), learning strategies are the particular approaches or techniques that learners employ to try to learn a L2/ a FL. They can be behavioral (for example, repeating new words aloud to help to remember) or they can be mental (for example, using the linguistic or situational context to infer the meaning of a new word). They are typically problem-oriented. That is, learners employ learning strategies when they are faced with some problem, such as how to remember a new word. Learners are generally aware of the strategies when they use and, when asked, and when they can explain what they did to try to learn something.

There are different kinds of learning strategies, and here we will consider three of them, namely:

- a) Cognitive strategies that are involved in the analysis, synthesis or transformation of learning materials. An example is recombination, which involves constructing a meaningful sentence by recombining known elements of the L2/ FL in a new way;
- b) Metacognitive strategies are those involved in planning, monitoring and evaluating learning. An example is selective attention, where the learner makes a conscious decision to attend to particular aspects of the input;
- c) Social/affective strategies concern the ways in which learners choose to interact with other speakers. An example is questioning for clarification (i.e. asking for repetition, a paraphrase or an example).

There have been various attempts to discover which strategies are important for L2/ FL acquisition. One way is to investigate how *good language learners* try to learn. This involves identifying learners who have been successful in learning a L2/ FL and interviewing them to find out the strategies that worked for them.

Ellis (2000) asseverates that one of the main findings on such studies is that successful language learners pay attention to both form and meaning and they are also very active (i.e. they use strategies for taking charge of their own learning), show awareness of the learning process and their own personal learning styles and, above all, are flexible and appropriate in their use of learning strategies. They seem to be especially adept at using Metacognitive strategies.

She also says that different strategies are related to different aspects of L2 or FL learning.

Thus, strategies that involve formal practice (for example, rehearsing a new word) contribute to the development of linguistic competence whereas strategies involving functional practice (for example, seeking out native speakers to talk to) aid the development of communicative skills. Successful learners may also call on different strategies at different stages of their development.

The study of learning strategies is of potential value to language teachers, and in this paper we focus on the three strategies already mentioned to develop the language school project in a Federal School in Rio Grande do Sul.

## **8 METHODOLOGY**

One of the goals of this school project was to improve language learning and to show the impact of the learning strategies on the production of a CD ROM, considering the students' production, using Instrumental English in the Computing area.

For this, initially it was selected the theory that was going to orient the students' work. As seen in the former sections, we regarded the language aptitude, the instrumental and the resultative motivation and the three learning strategies, namely: Cognitive, Metacognitive and Social/affective strategies.

After choosing the theoretical purpose, we started studying the facilities of the free software Hot Potatoes. We considered all its applicative tools and the students involved in the project created one activity for each applicative tool.



It is important to mention that there were seven students working on the project, and they all were on the second semester of the Computing course.

Their interest was born in the idea of using English in a real situation and learning context and also wanted to take part in academic writing, reporting what was done during the project.

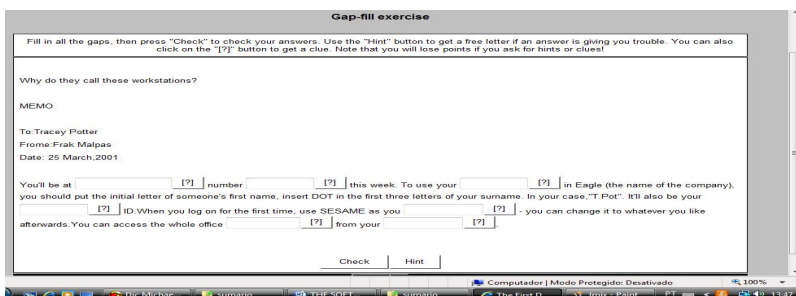
So, in the next section, we will discuss the results and the facilities used to write the activities, making reference to the learning strategies, motivation and learning aptitude.

## 9 – DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

In this section we will show some images of the students' work and discuss about the possible learning strategies they used and explain the facility of the software.

### 9.1 JCloze Activity

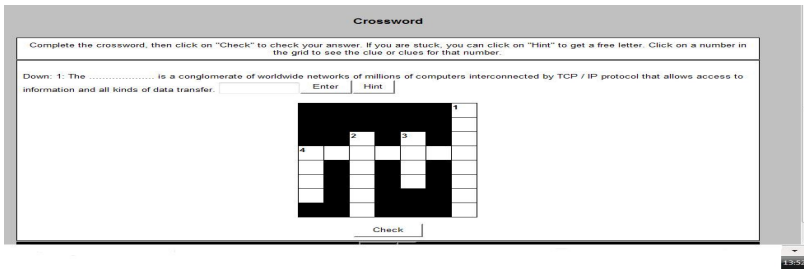
The first applicative tool to be analyzed is the *Jcloze*, where students could apply Cognitive, Metacognitive and also Social strategies, considering the kind of exercise they created, i.e. filling in the blanks to complete a sentence with cohesion and coherence.



PICTURE 1 – Activity Gap-fill exercise.

### 9.2 JCross Activities

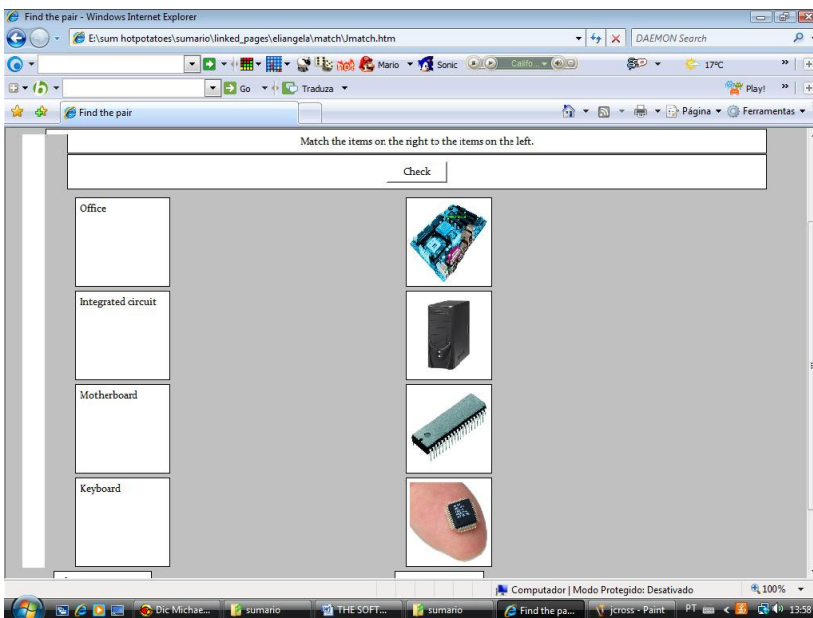
In this activity the students used their knowledge of the vocabulary, and so Cognitive, Metacognitive and also Social Strategies, especially when they had to write the tips to the possible users get the right word or answer.



PICTURE 2: Crossword.

### 9.3 JMatch Activities

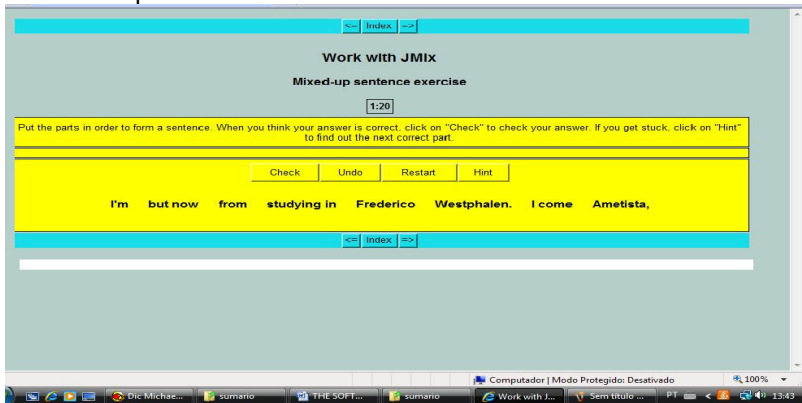
In this sort of exercise the students had to use their vocabulary knowledge, besides the Cognitive Strategy, it employs two ways of organizing the exercise, that is: using text or images. The students used both of them, and showed what they wanted the user to test, i.e. the ability to form and remember associations between stimuli (we can consider the images as a kind of stimuli).



PICTURE 3: Match the items

## 9.4 JMix

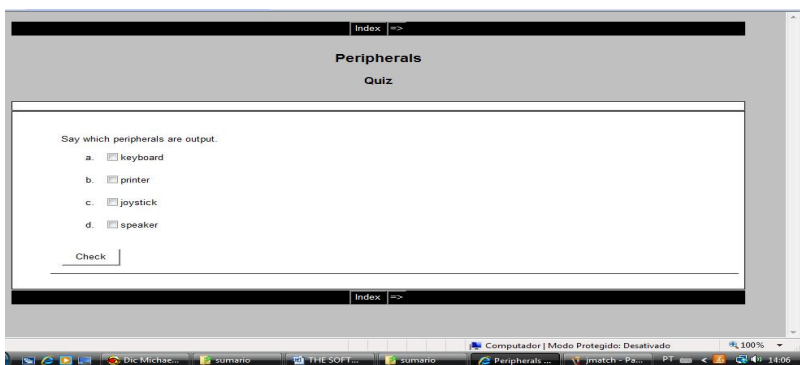
This activity allows users to analyze sentences, ordering words, using their grammar knowledge, besides Cognitive, Metacognitive and Social Strategies for a good communication, written or spoken.



PICTURE 4: Exercise work with Jmix.

## 9.5 JQuiz

This sort of exercise offers students to write questions of multiple choices, making them use Cognitive, Metacognitive and Social Strategies, especially when they have to think about the possible answers, create a coherent question and execute their previous knowledge about the computing area.



PICTURE 5: Exercise about peripherals.

## 10 CONCLUSION

This article tried to describe and show that it is possible to motivate language students to increase their fluency and skill with the target language by the means of interaction and the use of learning strategies.

To achieve this goal, that is creating an interactive language classroom, the teacher discussed with the students possibilities to develop the language using the technology in class.

For this, it was used the free software Hot Potatoes and its five applicative tools, namely JCloze, JCross, JMatch, JMix and JQuiz, which allowed students to achieve their goals and made them use the Cognitive, Metacognitive and Social Strategies, besides activating instrumental and the resultative motivation.

Considering this subject, the first motivation was observed since the beginning of the task and on the way students tried to execute their objectives and the second one was showed when the successful result of learning in the classroom context motivated them to produce the CD ROM.

So, this project offered students and their teacher the most important key to motivate the study of language that is to create an interactive language classroom, providing stimuli for continued interaction, because the group involved in the project, could develop a repertoire of learning strategies to produce language comfortably and using previous knowledge in the area of computing.

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