LEARNER GENERATED QUIZZES

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Introduction

This contribution touches upon the creative classroom activity which involves learners in quiz generation. Generally speaking, setting-up exercises is supposed to be a teacher's prerogative. Given the time and the space, however, learners are capable of creating their own exercises that benefit their learning, boost self-esteem and stimulate motivation.

There are a number of websites on the Net for generating various types of exercises and quizzes. One of the best is available at http://a4esl.org/. Firstly, it provides a multitude of choices, e.g. bilingual or monolingual, and a vast variety of formats (multiple choice, True or False, matching words & definitions, Power Point exercises, etc.). The major advantages of this website are generation swiftness and opportunity of immediate re-generation if errors in data have been spotted while checking/doing the quiz. Secondly, quizzes may be used for printing to paper, for putting on generator's own web server or downloaded on the quiz creator's, Charles Kelly's, web server. All in all, the software allows the design of ten different types of quizzes and is available free of charge to any learner or teacher. Last but nor least, this website is completely devoid of any advertising.

In the described activity, learners design vocabulary quizzes using Charles Kelly's Online Quiz Generator (http://iteslj.org/c). Learners are free to choose various formats and generate quizzes within a matter of minutes provided the quiz data were prepared in advance.

Level: pre-intermediate & above

Time: one or two hours (depending on quiz scope and number of quizzes)

Aims:

- to recycle vocabulary
- to promote learners' self-assessment
- to develop learners' interaction & cooperation

Preparation:

Learners prepare data on floppy disk as homework task.

Resources/ materials:

Possible problems:

Procedure

The online Quiz Maker (http://iteslj.org/c) allows learners to generate multiple-choice quizzes in various formats with a variable number of distractors (from 2 to 6) and have them printed to paper or put on one's own web server. The more distractors learners use in creating their quiz, the harder the quiz. It is advisable to process contextual vocabulary, i.e. combine a lexical content with a situational context. Recycling at random chosen vocabulary is not as effective as the vocabulary based on the previously covered topical material.

Ask learners to terminate the number of vocabulary items (from 10 to 15). Set the time limit for completing tasks.

If English classroom is equipped with computers, learners (either in pairs or individually) can generate quizzes in different formats, check if quizzes work well and then ask other pairs to solve their designed tasks. Computer session might last from one to two academic hours depending on the amount of time available for revision. Students recycle vocabulary (or grammar) by doing quizzes designed by other pairs / individuals and have fun at the same time.

This activity can be useful for developing fast thinking (essential in spontaneous speech) – but then it is essential to set a time limit for each exercise. Interaction and cooperation between pairs as well as assessing and self-assessing one's performance are important components of this activity.

In the first experiments of quiz generation, the majority of students of Universitas Studiorum Polona Vilnensis chose the most prestigious version – generating a bilingual quiz to be hosted on the Internet website. However, only a few students succeeded in having their quizzes uploaded at http://iteslj.org/v/po. A vast majority of learners have had their generated quizzes hosted at the temporary website http://iteslj.org/v/po-temp2/, basically because of the encoding problems of Polish characters. Interestingly, created quizzes worked very well after being generated. Surprisingly, Polish characters got corrupted after transferring the quiz into the .html file, sending it to the host website and getting it uploaded at the above mentioned website. Every time the learner wanted to use it, s/he had to adjust the encoding from the 'view' menu in their computer. This difficulty put many students off trying to get their quizzes uploaded on a prestigious permanent Charles Kelly's website. The cause of quiz corruption has not been cleared so far. As a matter of fact, I faced similar problems with Lithuanian characters while generating bilingual English-Lithuanian/Lithuanian-English quizzes (http://iteslj.org.v/lt), but fortunately this problem has been resolved thanks to Charles Kelly's

assistance. In my settings, the cause seems to have been due to incompatibility between different computers' software.

Since Universitas Studiorum Polona Vilnensis has no its own web server, the learners, who wanted to carry out individual computer tasks, chose generating a quiz printed to paper. In default of decoding problems, first, such generation saves time, and, second, designed quizzes are easier to assess – screen reading is thought to be more tiring than reading a printed text.

Overall students' assessment of computer tasks has been favourable. First, in spite of being accustomed to using computers for a variety of assignments, students remain attracted to computers and keen on using them for learning a foreign language. Second, in English classes learners favour working at their own pace and performing creative tasks. Third, the ability to complete the task successfully is a source of satisfaction for majority of learners.

Conclusion

Summing up, this activity is useful for recycling vocabulary and grammar, developing interaction and cooperation between pairs and for assessing / self-assessing one's performance. Successful performance of computer tasks enhances learners' motivation and boosts their self-esteem. Students have fun in carrying out the activity and, incredibly, enjoy spotting their own and peers' errors, although in usual settings misgivings of losing face prevent learners from being explicit.

Quiz generation needs no preparation on the teacher's part and allows the teacher to monitor students' performance and render aid if/when necessary.