Creating Vokis – online animated characters that speak

Topic

Online animation

Aims

- To practise speaking skills – pronunciation
- To develop familiarisation with online tools

Age/level

Primary – adult
CEFR level A1+

Time

90 minutes

Materials

1. Access to one computer per pair of learners – each computer needs to have:
   a. an internet connection
   b. Adobe Flash Player
   c. a headset with microphone
2. Ideally, a computer attached to a data projector for demonstrating the activity to the class and reviewing

Introduction

Vokis are great for practising speaking skills with learners of all ages. Creating an animated character and giving it a voice is really fun to do and breaks down the inhibitions that learners often have when faced with recording themselves speaking in English.

Procedure

Before class	• Create a free Voki account: www.voki.com
	• Create a Voki for yourself. This is a simple process and there are instructions you can follow on the Voki site.
	• When you record your Voki's voice, unashamedly exaggerate what your character has to say. This will help your learners to focus on and imitate the aspects of pronunciation you are interested in them reproducing.

	• I usually use this simple model the first time I create a Voki for a class: *My name is ...* (think of a name that fits the character you've created). *They call me .... because ...* (think of a reason – you can leave this line out with lower-level classes). *I love ...* (think of something your character loves doing). *I hate ...* (think of something your character hates doing).
1. Whole class demonstration of creating a Voki (20 mins)	• Log in to your Voki account. • Ask a learner to be a volunteer so you can demonstrate the steps involved in creating a Voki. Encourage everyone in the class to shout out their preferences as your volunteer chooses and customises the Voki character and selects its clothing and bling (accessories). This gets everyone involved and helps them remember the steps. • Now comes the process of giving the character a voice. Get your volunteer to click on the microphone image on the Voki page. • An Adobe Flash Player window will appear, asking permission to use the microphone. Get your volunteer to click *allow* and close the window. If you are using the simple language model I suggested above, before doing the recording get your learners to agree on the character's name, the reason for his/her name and what s/he loves and hates doing. • Your volunteer should click on *record*. When they have finished their speech, tell them to click on *stop*. • Disconnect the headset and connect your computer's speakers so that the whole class can hear the recording. If you and your learners are happy with it, the volunteer now clicks on *save* and will be prompted to give the audio file a title. This step is very important and you should insist that the learners remember it, because if they don't, they will lose their recording. If there's something you don't like with the recording, click on *cancel* and you can repeat the process again. • Now you are ready for the final touches. Get your volunteer to select a background for the character and a player (the frame it appears in). • The last step in creating your Voki is to click on *publish*. Again, this is very important because this is when you save all the work you've done up to now, and without it the Voki will be lost. • If you have a class blog or wiki, you can choose to embed your character into a post. In the My Voki section of the site, make sure that your latest Voki is the one that is visible on the left of the page. Choose where you want to embed your Voki, e.g. Blogger, WordPress, etc., and click on *get code*. • Paste the code into the HTML section of your post, click on *publish* and your Voki will appear on your site.

2. Learners create their own Voki (50 mins)	• Before your learners start work on the computers, elicit from them, or prompt if necessary, the language they've just used when going through the different steps of creating a Voki and are likely to use when they are interacting together at the computers, e.g.:

	o Choose that one!
	    o That one's better.
	    o No, I prefer that one.
	    o It's my turn.
	    o Click on the …
	    o Now save!

	• Get them to write their phrases in their notebooks and do a quick role play in pairs using them. This is really valuable language that they need to know and have fresh in their minds because it will be a great temptation for them to revert to their first language in the excitement of creating their Vokis.
	• Now your learners can start work on the computers. Get them to work in pairs and to use your login when they first open the Voki page – that way you'll have all their Voki characters in the same place to review together at the end of the class.
	• Monitor their work and remind them, if necessary, of both the language you modelled and the functional language they role played.
	• When your learners have finished their Vokis, review them in a whole-class session. Get learners to comment on each other's Vokis and vote for the one they like best.
3. Follow-up (20 mins)	• While the rest of your learners are working on another task, take the opportunity to spend time with each learner individually and to listen to their Voki.
	• Stop and start the sound to focus on any particular problems they may be having with language, individual sounds, sentence stress or intonation. Now you have a handy record of their speaking skills to measure their progress during the course and for assessment purposes!
Troubleshooting	• If you can't record your Voki, check that the headset is correctly connected and that the sound has not been muted on the computer.
	• If the Voki site doesn't accept your login or keeps reverting to it, reboot the computer.

Contributed by

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