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ReCALL Journal

The forthcoming issue of *ReCALL* (Vol. 14, Part 2) will be distributed to EUROCALL members in November/December 2002. Please send articles, software reviews, details of relevant events or other items of interest for future issues to June Thompson, Editor, *ReCALL*, EUROCALL Office, The Language Institute, University of Hull, Hull HU6 7RX, UK, E-mail: eurocall@hull.ac.uk.

All articles are considered by an international panel of referees. Notes for contributors can be found at: <http://www.eurocall-languages.org/recall/contrib.htm>



Reports on EUROCALL Special Interest Groups

3rd Pre-conference Workshop at EUROCALL 2002 in Jyväskylä (Finland): NLP in CALL - New Light Penetrates or No Longer Pertinent?

After two successful pre-conference workshops at EUROCALL 2000 in Dundee and EUROCALL 2001 in Nijmegen, the Special Interest Group on **Language Processing** organized its third workshop at EUROCALL 2002 in Jyväskylä, Finland, entitled NLP in CALL - No Longer Pertinent or New Light Penetrates.

The workshop focused on two areas of language processing that are highly relevant to CALL: **morpho-syntactic parsing for error diagnosis and the use of corpora for language learning and teaching**. It brought together speakers from Finland, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland. A total of five papers were presented.

The first paper, "**Teaching grammar with a treebank and a parser**", by Anju Saxena and Lars Borin, described work which is part of the project IT-based Collaborative Learning in Grammar, a collaboration between the universities in Uppsala and Stockholm and funded by the Swedish Agency for Distance Education (DISTUM). The paper discussed web-based material that gives students practical training in the skill of grammatical analysis.

Sébastien L'haire presented a paper entitled "**Syntactic and 'semantic' error detection**". He described research conducted at the University of Geneva in the framework of the European research project *FreeText*, which aims at developing an advanced hypermedia CALL software featuring NLP tools for a smart treatment of authentic documents and (relatively) free production exercises. The system targets intermediate to advanced learners of French.

The third paper, "**Ontology Enrichment with Conceptual Structures for Cross-Linguistic Disambiguation by Steve Legrand**" looked at Conceptual Structures, Ontology Enrichment, and Cross-linguistic Disambiguation to enhance natural language processing tasks for language learning. The ultimate goal is to disambiguate semantic structures to make learning more effective.

In his paper "**Learner-corpora and NLP**", Veit Reuer discussed ways to enhance the efficiency of non-anticipating parsers and possibly to supply material for anticipation-based systems by way of learner corpora which they have analyzed for error-types occurring most frequently. Their interest lies in German as a second language.

In the final paper, "**What have you done for me lately? The fickle alignment of NLP and CALL**", Lars Borin addressed factors that could be instrumental in fostering the attitudes of the two communities, NLP and CALL, toward each other. The paper focused on three factors: different backgrounds, different attitudes to technology, and language-learning ideology.

For the abstracts of the papers, please visit our website at <http://siglp.eurocall-languages.org/>

The organizer would like to thank the presenters and attendees for yet another successful SIGLP Pre-Conference Workshop.

Mathias Schulze & Trude Heift

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Projects

[[WELCOME Project](#)] [[HELLO NET Project](#)]

Socrates' funded **WELCOME Project**

WELCOME! - linguistic and cultural introduction module for incoming exchange students aims to provide linguistic and cultural preparation for future exchange students planning to go to countries where one of the LWULT languages is the official medium of instruction. It plans to provide this in a fully web based format so that students will be able to start studying the language and culture of the host institution before leaving, giving them the chance to study in their own time, in their own surroundings and yet in a collaborative way.

In a first phase a dedicated CALL authoring shell will be designed for creating language independent ICT-based language and culture courses based on the principles of autonomous and distance learning. In a second phase this shell will be elaborated into concrete learning materials for the languages of the partner institutions: Dutch, Finnish, Estonian, Portuguese and Spanish.

Learner support will be provided by means of a common workspace (forum) for synchronous and asynchronous communication and collaboration among students and tutors; a learner's log; self-assessment tools and other more general tools such as hyper-grammars and hyper-dictionaries. Even though there will be centralised learner support from each of the partners for their own language, local teachers will also assist the students *in situ*. Links to socio-cultural and practical information about the region will complete the on-line package. For future developers an authoring module to update materials and to develop new materials will be part of WELCOME. The product will be transferable to other languages.

Project co-ordinator: University of Ghent, Belgium

For further information contact: valere.meus@rug.ac.be

or visit the project website: <http://www.taalnet.rug.ac.be/welcome>

Socrates funded **HELLO NET Project**

HELLO NET-Hellenic Enjoyable Language Learning on the Net: Working on student mobility programs for some years has led us to realise that the number of foreign students who want to attend part of their courses in a Greek institution is very small, one of the drawbacks being language barriers. Another problem is the lack of information about the Greek academic life and culture. Information about the courses offered, the conditions of studies, accommodation, transportation, facilities and amenities in host cities, etc. The aim of the proposed project is to cover the above-mentioned needs in a systematic way. The project will build the HELLO Net (Hellenic Enjoyable Language Learning on the Net) web site in order to provide:

1. On-line distance learning educational materials for the teaching of elementary Greek to university students; a multimedia intensive course, video conferencing and other materials supported by web-based services in a user-friendly environment.
2. Web-based extensive services with information about Greek institutions and various useful links.

The project's outputs will facilitate incoming students to smoothly integrate into Greek academic and social life and raise awareness of the Greek culture. It will also help staff involved in monitoring mobility programs. The project's outputs will represent a Linguistic model whose potential will be able to be adapted to all languages and serve as a pattern for the production of on-line teaching materials as well as the building of educational web sites.

Project co-ordinator: Technical University of Thessaloniki, Greece

For further information contact: kartali@tour.teithe.gr

or visit the project website: <http://hellonet.teithe.gr>

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Recommended websites

RANDALL 'S ESL CYBER LISTENING LAB
<http://www.esl-lab.com>

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Site at a glance

Interactive on-line activities to practise and reinforce listening comprehension skills in the English language in diverse formats and study styles. On-line since 1998, the Cyber Listening Lab makes use of Java programming language, and requires video and audio playing software (for example, Real Audio/Video, Divace, Windows Media Player). Plug-ins, software and files in general are easy to access and download.

The site is developed and maintained by **Randall S. Davis**, from the **English Language Institute at the University of Utah (USA)**, and sponsored by **Divace Learning Solutions**.

Site contact information

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Site description

The site's homepage displays all of its many learning possibilities in a very clear, at-a-glance format. The opening menu screen is divided into two graphical sections. The left-hand side bar is in turn subdivided into three parts: a hyperlink which enables donations to help support and maintain the site to be made, a collection of links to internal site chapters (labelled with self-explanatory names: "Donate and Help", "Add a Link", "Divace Users", "First-Time Users", "Lab Design", "Media Players", "Multimedia Tutorials", "Self-Study Guide", "Site Survey", "Terms of Use", "Tips for Teachers" and "Contact"), and finally an on-line device which allows the visitor to subscribe free of charge to an e-mail list in order to receive information about changes and additions to the site. A larger area of this opening screen layout is occupied by what could be called the main site menu that organizes the listening comprehension exercises into 4 broad sections: "General Listening Quizzes" (73 activities), "Listening Quizzes for Academic Purposes" (23 activities), "Long Conversations with Real Video" (10 activities) and "Short Listening Exercises" (35 activities). Within each section, a further classification states the level of difficulty of the listening passages in order to guide the learner to the appropriate level from the very beginning. From this initial screen we can access the listening tasks themselves, indexed here by means of hyperlinked exercise titles illustrating the main topic of each task, thus reflecting a thematic criterion for classifying (rather than a grammatical or structuralist one), in tune with the aural nature of the website. At the top of the homepage is a hyperlink to information about the author, just below the sponsor's banner, and a hyperlinked horizontal list of other sections of the website ("What's New", "FAQs", "Download", "Links", "Help", "Search", "Bulletin Boards" and "Voice Mailbox"). This list is repeated at the bottom of the screen in order to facilitate information retrieval.

In the main, the listening exercises have a roughly similar structure. Close to the title is a table specifying the level, topic, text type, speakers and duration. All the exercises are divided into three stages: pre-listening, listening and post-listening, but only the listening section itself involves web-based interaction. The pre- and post-listening tasks include warm-up questions and follow-up discussion ideas. The typology of listening exercises includes a multiple choice comprehension quiz, a filling-the-gap text completion exercise and the possibility of listening while following the transcript. Choices can be made as to which audio format and software can be used to playback the files (Real Audio/Video and Divace Software), with details about file size and PC/Mac options. In the listening scripts there is a help feature which enables the user to highlight a specific vocabulary item and receive an immediate definition in English of the highlighted word. As regards correction feedback for the listening quizzes, there are several buttons which alternatively show the score (in a percentage form) and the correct answer. Depending on the exercise, the learner can choose whether to see the correct answer straightaway or do so after completing the multiple-choice or gap-filling task, but, unlike in other CALL applications, the correct answer is never hidden until the student has tried the question a number of times. The correct answers are usually not explained but simply given to the learner, therefore feedback is limited.

Although the exercises within each section are, as we said, similar, there are some variations that are worth mentioning. For example, some activities integrate the use of graphical information such as maps, graphs, train schedules, etc., on attached screens displayed as the student completes certain exercises ("Directions 1 and 2", "Finding the Right Job", "Bus Schedule"), thus offering an authentic contextualised support to carry out the listening tasks. Another innovative example is "Animal Sounds", which uses animal sounds (with no linguistic support), to identify names of animals in English. On the other hand, the three exercises called "Paralanguage", "Personality Types" and "Requests" have a noticeable pragmatic and metalinguistic component, since they promote language awareness on the learner's part regarding the language function which is being used in context and allow speaking about language use. Some other exercises require plug-ins, which are always easy to obtain ("Getting Around Tokyo"), or even enable the user to listen not only to the spoken fragment but also to the comprehension questions themselves ("Camping Under the Stars").

Analysis

Some exercises allow a wide variety of student choice in open alternatives to accessing the site contents and in completing options. This freedom of choice regarding learning delivery modes and access is compatible with current pedagogical approaches to active language learning which also argue for teaching materials to be adaptable to different learning styles. In addition, there is room on the website for communicative and situational aspects related to Communicative Language Learning, illustrated for example in fragments incorporating authentic and contextualized spoken discourse ("Randall's Introduction", "Welcome to Sky Airlines").

Two website sections worth noting are "Study Guide" and "Voice Mailbox". The former re-indexes the site listening exercises into a structure of 10 didactic units based on topical and situational criteria ("School and Jobs", "City Life" and so on) which also incorporate statements about the communicative language functions covered in every module. This might appeal to students and teachers who prefer a more structured and coursebook-like approach, and the feature is yet another way of leaving the choice open to the site user as regards the study path to be followed. The "Voice Mailbox" is, to say the least, a very original and useful application. Within this section, the user is welcome to pose a question or comment which can be submitted via e-mail to the author, who will reply, in turn, by e-mail. If he considers the question interesting his reply will include an attached audio file. Some examples are posted onto the site for the learner to gain access to even more listening practice. Such an on-line facility represents a clear innovation as far as the learning medium is concerned, since the user communicates with the author/teacher in a way which, asynchronous though it may be, nevertheless incorporates those intentional aspects that are usually encountered in all real communicative processes.

In line with the general pedagogic rationale of this listening course which encourages different learning styles and paths, the exercises under the heading "Listening Quizzes for Academic Purposes" include the possibility of getting an explanation clarifying the right answers - much more enriching than the mere display of the correct choices ("First Day of Class", "Our Aging Society").

In the section "Long Conversations with Real Video" the learner can playback both a video and an audio sequence. However, some videos are foreground shots of the person speaking, which, in our view, does not add much value to the listening task, but rather fails to make use of the many educational possibilities of video for contextualised practice. On the credit side of this section, however, there are two good instances of innovation; for example, in "Lecture on Culture Shock" - where the learner may come across hypertext with hot words, access to a glossary of explained terms, food for linguistic and pragmatic reflection about the text - or, as in "Bamboo Artifacts", the possibility of accessing an ISDN service.

As can be seen, this is a sound and robust tool that focuses on contextualized practice on listening skills in English. It offers extensive training to improve listening comprehension, and is thus very useful with regard to the aural side of language learning, which should be welcome especially within a medium (the World Wide Web) which more often than not ignores listening-related skills. Even when the variety of exercise types is not very wide, this excellent website is very clearly organized and structured, and, at the same time, it allows for different study paths in a non-linear fashion and promotes individual student choices as far as audio delivery is concerned, which makes the learning process richer and more motivating. In addition, the site is extremely user-friendly and, large

as it may be, it does not create a feeling of information overload and chaos which, unfortunately, is so frequent on the World Wide Web.

Having said this, one could also argue that the excellent material on the website should also be organised and classified according to criteria other than topics, level of difficulty and, occasionally, linguistic function. Another (debatable) weak point of the website is the fact that it doesn't incorporate many links to other sites offering listening practice, nor does it allow visitors to contribute with new exercises or at least with favourite links. In this respect, the hyperlinked headings "Add a link" or "Bulletin Boards" are to some extent misleading, since they do not offer such a degree of open interaction as could be expected from these labels. Another limitation is the fact that the site pays little or no attention at all to language varieties other than American English. It is also quite restricted to listening comprehension, without much skills integration, although this could be considered a specialization rather than a limitation. What is undeniable is the website's ability to become a versatile learning tool, which can be customized to many learning contexts and situations, and can be -and in fact is- constantly extended, improved and renewed.

A site feature that deserves a mention is the fact that the website author, Randall S. Davis, appears on the site (his site) as a real person, as a teacher who is always there (virtually?) to offer help and support to learners and teachers alike. The author of the exercises, his family and his roots are spread all over the website, thus providing it with a warm human touch which is sometimes difficult to find on the Web. The user notices that Mr. Davis is a very enthusiastic language teacher, which could increase motivation in students approaching the site for English learning purposes. These students/users can also practice the language while handling the many materials on the website dealing with the site itself, or with language learning and language use, which adds some metalinguistic value to the site.

Technologically speaking, Randall's Cyber Listening Lab is a very efficiently developed, designed and optimised website. Audio and video files, as well as supporting software and plug-ins are easily and quickly downloaded, and they work. So does the Java-programmed interface. The feedback given to learners on completing the exercises, nevertheless, is not very varied and could be improved in the future. The site, as a matter of fact, is not new, and it is still up and running after approximately 4 years. This is proof of its qualities and strengths, which come from its taking advantage of the potential of the World Wide Web as a language learning environment promoting communicative interaction.

Date of retrieval from the WWW: 5th September 2002

**Review by Rafael Seiz Ortiz
Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, Spain**

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Publications by EUROCALL members: review

Beyond Babel

Felix U. (2001) *Beyond Babel: Language Learning Online*, Melbourne: Language Australia, 378 pages, book plus CD-ROM, ISBN 1 876768 25 8. Available in Europe from Camssoft: <http://www.camssoftpartners.co.uk/>

This review will also appear in Vol. 1/2002 of TELL&CALL: <http://www.e-lisa.at/magazine/telcall>

Beyond Babel follows on from Uschi Felix's 1998 publication *Virtual Language Learning: Finding the Gems Amongst the Pebbles*. The main aim of the earlier publication was to raise language teachers' awareness about the treasure house of resources available to them on the WWW and to present them with ideas for integrating interesting websites into their teaching. *Beyond Babel* has the same broad aim, but especially

"... to discourage the reinvention of the wheel and to encourage global cooperation. In many cases desired materials may already exist, so there should be more to gain from developing complementary resources than duplicating what is already available." (p. 7)

An important statement – which I hope all Web-based language learning enthusiasts will take note of – appears in the opening pages of the book:

"... it takes a very special person to learn and, especially, speak a language without face-to-face communication." (p. 8)

The book includes two completely new sections:

- i. Section 1, eight case studies written by practising language teachers;
- ii. Section 3, two detailed research studies that look at both teachers' and students' perceptions of Web-based language learning.

Section 2 ("Virtual Language Learning Revisited") is essentially an expanded version of the 1998 publication, containing an update of the information therein, with newly categorised and annotated descriptions of around 600 websites. This section is also stored on the accompanying CD-ROM, making it easier to explore the websites as all the URLs are clickable.

The case studies described in Section 1 are useful illustrations of different approaches to online learning. Their budgets vary from zero to around €300K. Only one case study, InterDeutsch (<http://www.interdeutsch.de/>), is strictly commercial and not based in a university – where costings are often ludicrously unrealistic and where a captive student audience, enjoying the advantages of very fast access to the Internet or a local Intranet, does not represent the typical distance learner. The following comments by Claudia Popov, the author of the chapter on InterDeutsch, are particularly revealing:

- i. "Generally, the reactions to the content were positive. What students enjoyed most was the personal contact with the teacher; the majority of them were at an advanced level of German and needed, above all, a native speaker's pedagogical input." (p. 24)
- ii. "Instead of relatively expensive individualised courses for intermediate and advanced learners, what seems to be worth developing is a set of simple, general and cheap units of about five exercises per subject that would supplement other teaching materials at every level. This may be the central lesson to be drawn from our experience, and may well serve as a guideline for future projects." (p. 25)
- iii. "The main problems for any further development are technical. [...] At this point, nothing more can be done with so little funding." (p. 25) [Reviewer's note: "so little" = zero in the case of InterDeutsch.]

Although Uschi Felix is enthusiastic about the usefulness of the Web in language learning and teaching, she is also realistic and does not hesitate to mention its shortcomings compared to other delivery media, e.g. the problems associated with bandwidth and plug-ins, and the lack of universal standards for accessing the Web. CD-ROMs are still more reliable in delivering graphics, sound and video:

"While improvements have not been uniform, they have been achieved largely by way of better technologies that have led, among other things, to better presentation. This is notable in the case of graphics and sound, even if the Web still cannot match the reliable quality offered by CD-ROM. [...] Technological advance, however, is not always an unmixéd blessing; while we are still waiting for the long promised broadband services to become widely available, sites using the latest developments in graphics can take a wearying time to download over a 56K modem. There are other problems online, too – some plug-ins do not work in every context, and some sites are available only to Internet Explorer or Netscape, while others cater for Windows but not Macintosh. The Web's ideal of universal standards is not always achieved." (p. 189)

This is why the designer of online language learning materials is advised to adopt

“... hybrid approaches designed to avoid potential technical problems, such as downloading activities from the Web on to a self-contained Intranet, integrating CD-ROMs and the Web, or running audio conferencing or videoconferencing with Web activities.” (p. 190)

My own experience is that the above advice has not been heeded by the new generation of language teachers, i.e. those who have entered the world of TELL and CALL in the Post-Web Period and who perceive the Web as the *only* ICT resource. A major problem associated with the Web is that it is perceived as a huge collection of freebies. This has led to a blinkered attitude towards ICT and an acceptance of poor-quality CALL materials that would have been unacceptable as long ago as the mid-1980s. Stephen Orr, former Director of Talkfast, cites this attitude to ICT as one of the reasons for the dramatic fall in CD-ROM sales in the late 1990s, and posted the following message at Talkfast’s website, following the liquidation of his company in December 2000:

“More free resources are now available; and even if they are less effective than CD-ROMs, those with a limited budget will try them first; and those with limited access to hardware will have even less time to use CD-ROMs.”

There is a glut of drill-and-kill materials on the Web, produced by amateurs who have learned nothing about input analysis, branching and feedback, and whose screen design skills are completely lacking. There are many lessons to be learned from the past (Davies 1997).

But, as Uschi Felix observes, the trend is changing:

“A noticeable and interesting development is the spread of commercialisation even in sites that started off as free but have changed, if only by including banner advertising and a shop. The trend is not yet powerful enough to justify predictions that the Web will eventually split into quality sites for which users have to pay and free sites that are of poor quality, but there are signs of change. Given the expense involved in creating, running and updating any site, the chances must be that the best material will be developed by sites that can rely on costs being covered by income generated, even if, as Claudia Popov’s article in Part 1 shows, this is not a trouble-free option.” (pp. 189-190)

This reminds us of the dangers of excessive reliance on technology: “Technology is not the panacea” (Davies 1997: 29ff). But there are still some educational administrators who would be happy to replace teachers with robots. I recently heard an educational administrator remark publicly – and in all seriousness – that all we had to do now is develop Web-based distance-learning materials that are good enough to enable us to dispense with the teacher. I responded by pointing out that acquiring proficiency in a language involves the acquisition of a variety of performance skills, which is rather like acquiring proficiency in playing a musical instrument – and it is obvious that such skills need to be assessed by a human being. I then asked the administrator why there is no Web-based course in playing the piano. He became a little flustered by my question and brushed it aside, so I followed it up with another question: “Then I presume you would be happy to introduce a Web-based driving test too?” I was pleased to see Uschi Felix echoing my views:

“... it can be difficult to determine the overall teaching approach of any site because what is freely accessible on the Web is often only part of a larger package that also invariably includes face-to-face teaching. It is likely that the most exciting learning takes place off-line in the creative processes negotiated between teachers and learners, sometimes across continents, in which the Web features as a tool rather than instructor.” (pp. 190-191)

Section 3 (research studies) contains a large number of important conclusions, e.g.

- i. “[The] advantages [of the Web] outweighed disadvantages to a great extent, especially when technical problems are discounted.” (p. 351)
- ii. “The participating students [...] all had access to a teacher, either face-to-face or by email.” (p. 351)
- iii. “... the majority were using the Web, not on its own, but as an additional resource to face-to-face teaching. The strongest preference was to use the Web within face-to-face teaching, while the weakest was for distance education without a tutor.” (p. 351)
- iv. “There, is [...] no indication that the use of technology is any threat to the survival of teachers. In fact, the contrary is true.” (p. 351)
- v. “... the Web’s best potential lies in adding quality to teaching and learning environments rather than in replacing them” (p. 351)
- vi. “... learners of all ages feel comfortable in the environment and enjoy it.” (p. 352)
- vii. “... beginners were the least comfortable, and distance students and younger students most comfortable.” (p. 352)
- viii. “Our studies confirm strongly that the biggest hindrance to learning with technology is malfunctioning technology.” (p. 352)
- ix. “... male and non-native students were most dependent on face-to-face contact.” (p. 352)
- x. “The factors that adult students valued most highly in terms of the usefulness of the material are *clear objectives, ease of navigation, meaningful feedback, and clear and logical content.*” (p. 355)
- xi. “It was not surprising that the lack of speaking practice was seen as a great disadvantage of using the Web for language learning activities.” (p. 357)

Although Uschi Felix’s book has been written in Australia its focus is global, apart from the case studies in Section 1, only two of which are not Australian, namely the InterDeutsch project, which is based in Germany, and an EFL project based in Israel. Nevertheless, there is a good deal to be learned in this section, as Australia is probably far ahead of Europe – out of necessity – in the development of online distance learning of languages.

I would thoroughly recommend this publication both to newcomers to the field and to old hands. It is largely jargon-free and addresses practising language teachers rather than technologists. The last word shall remain with Uschi Felix:

“Finally, however highly one rates the potential of the Web, it is difficult to imagine that any of this will ever replace best practice face-to-face teaching. What is becoming more and more obvious with emerging research, is that the new technologies offer excellent potential for adding value to classroom teaching in a large variety of ways.” (p. 358).

For further information see:

<http://www.personal.monash.edu.au/~ufelix/babel.shtml>

Reference

Davies G.D. (1997) “Lessons from the past, lessons for the future: 20 years of CALL”. In Korsvold A-K. & Rüschoff B. (eds.) *New Technologies in Language Learning and Teaching*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Also on the Web at: <http://www.camsoftpartners.co.uk/coegdd1.htm>

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Events Calendar

For information on events, please refer to <http://www.eurocall.org/resources/calendar.htm>, which is regularly updated.

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Site designed and maintained by [Fred Riley](#)
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