European Association for Computer-Assisted Language Learning

The EUROCALL Review

Issue number 11, March 2007

Editor: Ana Gimeno

ISSN: 1695-2618

Table of Contents

ReCALL Journal

From 2007, *ReCALL* will appear three times a year, in January, May and September. This will provide an opportunity to publish occasional Special issues, the first of which, *Integrating Corpora in Language Learning and Teaching,* will appear in September 2007. A further Special issue on Mobile Phones is also planned.

The forthcoming issue of *ReCALL* (Vol. 19, Part 2) will be distributed to EUROCALL members in May/June 2007. Please send articles, software reviews, details of relevant events or other items of interest for future issues to June Thompson, Editor *ReCALL* d.j.thompson@hull.ac.uk.

The journal contents are listed at:

http://www.eurocall-languages.org/recall/r_contents.html

All articles are considered by an intenational panel of referees. Notes for contributors can be found at:

http://www.eurocall-languages.org/recall/contribnotes.html

Top

Projects

OUOcoursebook.com

An organic, universal, online coursebook (🙂U🙂)

http://www.ouowebsite.com/ is a pilot website designed as part of a language learning materials development research project at the University of Limerick, Ireland.

OUO - which stands for 'Organic' 'Universal' 'Online' - is an online coursebook with a 'text-driven approach' (Brian Tomlinson e.g. 2003: 110) which has set out to compile and offer texts and learning materials from a range of EIL cultures; hence its **universal** tag. The **online** interactivity in this coursebook is in the compiling of the material rather than within the materials themselves. The OUO coursebook is authored collaboratively in that teachers/materials writers access the site online and upload teaching materials, growing the coursebook **organically**; and teachers can equally download and print materials for use in the classroom. In order to make the materials as versatile as possible, they are available in Word, so that they can be customised, as well as pdf format.

Background and rationale
The OUO coursebook is proposed as one possible solution offered to the twin problems perceived as bugging the traditional printed global ELT coursebook: cultural inappropriacy, and dating. The present trend towards publishing coursebooks for local markets is tacit admission of the failure of the global coursebook to embrace the diverse needs of international EFL/ESOL/EIL markets. The problem of dating, on the other hand, is inherent to the print-based medium. Even by the time a new ELT coursebook hits the shelves any of its potentially most interesting content is dated. Attempting to avoid the problem by addressing topics with long shelf lives - 'the environment', 'the developing world', 'sport', 'the media' -backfires in terms of their potential to generate interest and engagement.

Having an online presence combines the advantages of the new technologies - up to date content; updateable, continuously-regenerating materials, and accessibility; with the appeal of a 'local' textbook, through its growing collection of locally produced materials generated by local practitioners 'on the ground' in different EIL countries.

Description
The key feature of OUOcoursebook.com, is that it is collaborative and authorable, and in this sense has some of the features of a wiki, although users do not work directly on the same document. Teachers/materials writers can submit learning materials to the site:
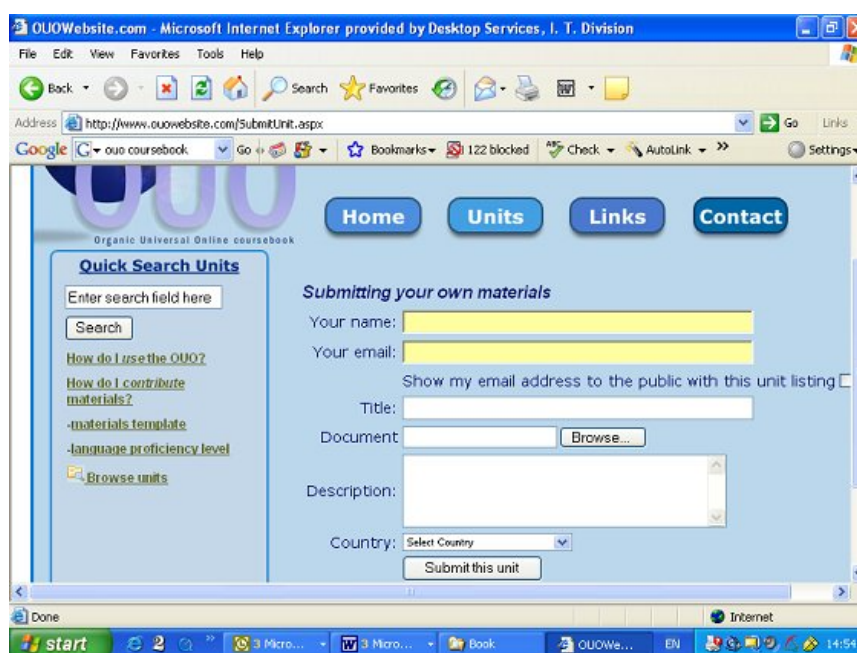
at which point the material goes to the administrator who approves and/or edits it, and then uploads it to the site. A key aspect of the specifications given to the developer of the site was that the material should be available to the user in pdf format (for a professional appearance) as well as in MSWord (to allow the material to be customized by the end-user, i.e. teacher). Material can be uploaded in either format but the administrator converts the submissions so that both formats are available to the site-user.

Materials template
The OUO is conceived as a coursebook, albeit with a text-driven syllabus rather than a traditional grammar or content-based one (see below), and to prevent it being just another collection of 'ready-to-go' materials, a structure for the units is offered (although not imposed), in the form of a materials template. This structure was designed to be as approach-neutral as possible but the author was aware that it would inevitably be imbued with her own

teaching and cultural background which is why it is only 'suggested'. It is hoped that alternative 'templates' might emerge from contributions of materials from different cultures, and which can then be added. As it stands at the moment, there are frameworks for two main activity types: text-based and task-based, although the two might be used in tandem:
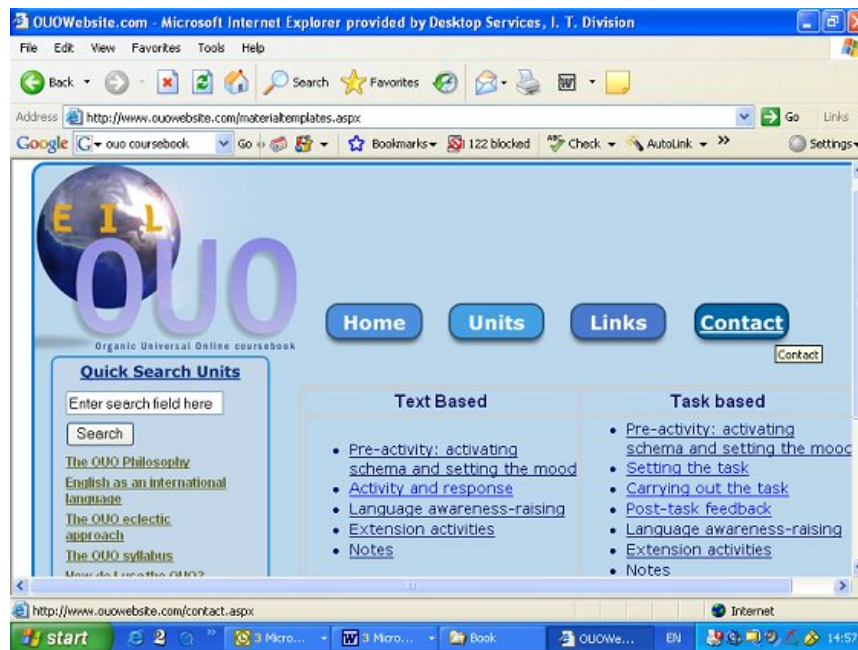
Both frameworks move from traditional 'warm-ups' through response and other activities and culminate in language awareness activities. These last come together to form the language 'syllabus' which thus grows organically out of the materials covered (see **Pedagogical Issues** below). In keeping with the organic aspect of the coursebook and in order to maximise versatility, a comments button beneath each unit allows users to add feedback on the material; depending on its nature, this feedback may prompt revision of the material (by the administrator or author), or may simply be **comments** that are useful for other users.

From the point of view of the user, materials are available as units and in keeping with the universal-local ethos of the coursebook, are categorised by country of origin.

Technical specifications
The website was written using the Active Server Pages Plus (ASPX 1.1) scripting language with SQL to access the MySQL 5.0 database. These technologies allow visitors to quickly and easily query the coursebook, download the materials and then post feedback. They also allow for easier administration of the website as the process of submitting materials is automated.

At present, the design uses the older technique of using tables to position the elements on the page. Through the EUROCALL discussion list, it was pointed out (by Stewart Arneil) that there is a much more efficient and powerful method of doing this which will also provide for greater accessibility to those with visual impairments (this aspect was pointed out by Fred Riley). The website will be redesigned to use Cascading Style Sheets to position elements and to fully control the presentation aspect of the website. New features and functionality will also be incorporated as users provide feedback and offer suggestions.

Pedagogical issues
1. *What about the syllabus?*
One of the issues faced in the design of this website as a 'coursebook' is that of the syllabus. Unlike a coursebook syllabus which is imposed on the learner, learning through the materials on the website (or indeed, any set of authentic or semi-authentic texts) makes for an 'organic' syllabus that arises out of the language work done with the texts. The syllabus is thus 'text-driven' (see Tomlinson 1998: 147, Mishan 2005: 59) rather than the other way round (as is common with traditional coursebooks).

The rationale for this draws on L2 acquisition research; to be very brief, with reference to concepts such as; Interlanguage whereby learners construct and continually revise their own conception of the target language grammar (Selinker 1972); the concept of language acquisition as an *organic process,* more like growing a garden than the linear, ordered and cumulative model underlying the traditional syllabus (Nunan 1998:101-2); the *teachability hypothesis* which posits that learners acquire only those structures that their interlanguage is primed to acquire (Pienemann 1985: 37); *constructivism* and the idea that learners take on board what is relevant and useful to them; the *noticing hypothesis* i.e. that noticing is essential for converting input to intake (Schmidt 1990).

This last, is, of course, central to corpus-based approaches to language learning e.g. data-driven learning. It was also one explanation for the early success of language learning via the new technologies (e.g. Warschauer 1998), i.e. the fact that learners were simply reading more (e.g. on email and the web) and thus *noticing* language features more, in particular features of oral language which hitherto had not been so easily available in the written mode.

The key feature of the **text-driven syllabus** is that it is customised and unique: it emerges from the set of texts selected for a particular class having particular needs and in a particular setting. Texts can be selected -by the teacher or students- on the basis of age/cultural-appropriacy; the appeal of their subject matter; their language content and challenge; the types of activities built around them, and so on.

2. *What about language proficiency level?*
Materials available on the site are deliberately not classified by 'proficiency level'. The principle is that it is the *task* that is graded to suit the proficiency level of the learners rather than the *text;* the texts posted on the site are selected on the basis of being as broadly applicable as possible (if appropriate, an indication of proficiency level may be suggested). This means not only that lower level learners might get to work with more challenging and motivating texts, but that more proficient language users might work with texts that present not so much linguistic as intellectual challenge.

Progress of the pilot to date: the 'ohnonotantherEFLwebsite'-effect
The main design fault in this project is that it makes or breaks on contributions from others. Lack of interest has partly to do with **saturation**, the 'ohnonotantherEFLwebsite'-effect - people are inured to the catalogue of web sites -however alluring- arriving daily into their inboxes.

One of the objectives in designing the site was to integrate it into the MA ELT programme which the author lectures on at the University of Limerick, Ireland http://www.ul.ie/~lcs/programmes/postgraduate-programmes/ma-elt/ Students on the MA will be asked to contribute materials as part of the materials development module which is offered as an elective. The site will also be inaugurated at the ELT Materials Symposium and Conference, Perak, Malaysia in February 2007 http://www.micelt.com.my/ where local teachers will be invited to develop and upload materials to the site during a hands-on session.

In conclusion, as an ongoing project, feedback and contributions are most welcome!
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http://www.ouowebsite.com/

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Top

Book Review

Language Learning with Computers: The Students' Perspective
A Theoretical and Empirical Investigation
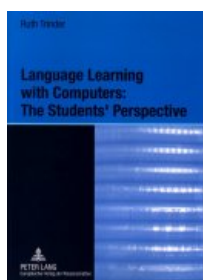
Trinder, Ruth (2006)

Language Learning with Computers: The Students' Perspective
A Theoretical and Empirical Investigation

Published by Peter Lang GmbH, Frankfurt.

ISBN: 3-631-55081-2 (358 p.)

As its subtitle suggests, this book is a doctoral thesis consisting of "a theoretical and empirical investigation", covering both the practical and theoretical sides of the research topic at hand. This topic is Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) from the point of view of the learner's perception and actual use. In trying to establish an empirically-based (as well as theoretically-grounded) connection between CALL, individual differences of the students and other contextual variables, the scope of the work in fact embraces the entire language learning process, in this particular case through technology and within a given context. Therefore, it is not surprising that the book deals with a wide range of disciplines and research concerns, partly because the fields of Individual Differences, within Second Language Acquisition (SLA), on the one hand, and CALL, on the other hand, are among the most multidisciplinary areas of the language learning and teaching domain. And it does so thoroughly and in depth, which is a very welcome achievement. That is why the author considers her research as being interdisciplinary and integrative in nature.

As stated in the preface, the book departs from the overarching pedagogical premise that any teaching approach should tend to adapt to the students' individual learning styles and preferences, as well as being contextually appropriate. This is easier said than done, so one of the author's main objectives throughout the book is to discover the intricacies of the multifaceted links between CALL materials, individual students and the learning context. In Trinder's words, "the aim, in broadest terms, is to investigate not the causes, but the effects of integrating CALL in the (...) curriculum" (p. 9). Needless to say, such a difficult task must be carried out with a given learning context in mind. Ambitious as this aim may seem, the author of the thesis manages very successfully to draw a comprehensive and fully informative picture of how learners of a particular pedagogical context perceive, use and take advantage of CALL, as well as what individual differences and contextual issues bear an influence on the students' uptake of this type of technology-based language learning. But this is not the only merit of the book, since, to my view, it also, and especially, demonstrates a solid research methodology that can be followed in future investigations with the aim of studying the efficiency of CALL from the learner's standpoint. In other words, although the thesis, on one level, analyses the implementation of a specific CALL application with specific students in a particular and clearly depicted environment or context, on another more abstract level, it also serves as a model to conduct similar research efforts that take the students' perspective into account. This is, as far as we know, a very appealing innovation of the study. Indeed, not much research work has been conducted with such a broad scope and in such an exhaustive manner within the field of Individual Differences in CALL. It is, then, very interesting to find a study dealing with CALL that takes the student's views into account.

Still within the topic of the research methodology applied in this study, two important aspects are worth being mentioned. Firstly, the whole book is a good example of how to establish a two-way link between theory and practice. This feature makes it interesting both for the theoretical researcher (in various fields, such as SLA, Psychology or Educational Technology) and for the language learning practitioner or other types of practical researcher. The author draws upon Ellis' belief that both the theoretical issues and the pedagogical practical concerns are relevant in bridging the gap between SLA and Language Pedagogy, and that the former can to some extent illuminate (rather than be directly applied to) the latter (Ellis 1992). As a result of this mutual and influential relationship between theory and practice, the reader can find theoretical models together with experimental studies and pedagogical reflections. Secondly, the work clearly establishes the research parameters and coherently discusses research methodological issues of prime importance, such as validity, error margins, sample sizes, statistical methods or interpretation pitfalls, to mention but a few. The result is a solid research study that is well justified and draws relevant conclusions.

From the earliest stages in the history of CALL, computers and related technologies have been suggested as suitable and efficient tools in order to achieve a high degree of individualization in language learning and teaching, as well as to provide the ideal match between teaching methods and individual differences (learners' styles and preferences). Nevertheless, such a claim has very seldom been supported (or contradicted) by empirical results and sound research studies. This fact represents an important gap in existing CALL research literature, and this book no doubt contributes to filling this gap. Nonetheless, according to the author, more research is needed to offer deeper insights of the presumed capability of CALL to meet the requirements of

individual students in a better way than, say, other conventional teaching and learning environments. Then, it can be said that the book does not take for granted certain statements and pedagogical conclusions that could be regarded as gratuitous or not sufficiently proven by relevant research. Other examples such statements are: "the learner that is put in front of self-access learning technologies is automatically supposed to become an autonomous learner" or "the fact that a given (help) facility is available in a CALL application means that the student will use it (efficiently)". Among many others, these commonplace claims are under close scrutiny in this book, and the results of some of its investigations often make us notice an unfortunate mismatch between, for instance, certain CALL features and the actual use and perception of such features by the language learners, i.e. the end-users of the software.

The book is divided into four distinct sections, followed by an extensive Bibliography and an Appendix containing the research questionnaires used throughout the book. The first section consists of a preface and three short parts called Overview, where the contents of the following three chapters are summarised, Research questions, including the main hypothesis and questions to guide the research, and Methodology, where the research methods and tools are listed and explained.

The following section, entitled PART 1: Research into Individual Differences includes a comprehensive review of the research literature concerning learners' individual differences and other related areas within Second Language Acquisition, such as learning styles. The reported themes, findings and theoretical models are at all times interpreted in the light of the research focus of the thesis, rather than merely incorporated to the discussion in a neutral way, which is a strong point of the book, given the great amount of information provided. This critical revision represents a solid base to inform the development of the empirical part of the study later on.

This theoretical background is further developed in PART 2: CALL and its theoretical context. This deals with CALL and what this relatively new area and its feeder disciplines can contribute to the analysis of the given learning context, i.e. the implementation of a piece of CALL in tertiary education with real students of English for Business Purposes. The section discusses a number of issues. Firstly, the theoretical background of CALL research is presented. Secondly, the relationships between theory and pedagogy, on the one hand, and between SLA and CALL are dealt with, since this part conceptualizes some relevant ideas derived from acquisition studies from the point of view of technology-based language learning (CALL). Third, some aspects in relation with theoretically-based CALL development are studied. Consideration is also given to broader contextual issues in CALL environments, such as task characteristics or individual differences within this type of learning. Finally, the chapter discusses some key objectives and targets within the research agenda of this discipline. Therefore, parts 1 and 2 of the book, in an accumulative way provide the theoretical basis which the rest of the thesis is built upon. This structure clearly illustrates the close connection between theory and practice mentioned above.

These theoretical considerations lead to the final section, PART 3: Empirical research, which includes 10 empirical studies conducted in order to draw a comprehensive picture of language learning through technology (and also in face-to-face environments) from the point of view of the individual learners in a given context. This context is a University setting with students of English for Business Studies during two semesters, with two pieces of CALL software called *OEM 1* and *OEM 2,* specifically developed for this context and these particular students. Before conducting the empirical studies, the author collects findings from Parts 1 and 2 and draws them together in order to design and inform the studies. These studies investigate the role of learner-internal and learner-external factors in the use and perception of CALL by the learners. Since theoretical aspects relating to individual differences deriving from SLA and CALL have previously been put into practice in order to develop the CALL programmes, some of the empirical studies also shed light on the appropriateness and efficiency of the CALL products, from the point of view of their adaptation to those individual differences. To this end, the thesis also addresses the suitability of some pedagogical features of the CALL software in terms of learner variables. On the other hand, great care is taken in constructing the research method, with the establishment of fairly focused and comprehensive research questions, and the related tools, mainly consisting of *ad hoc* questionnaires, as well as interviews and screen recordings. It must be said that the research section is not limited to CALL, since the specific classroom environment of the experiment is also carefully analysed. The empirical section concludes with the interpretation of the results and, what is more, with the proposal of a theoretical model that accounts for the role of learners' individual and other contextual variables in the perception and use of a blended language learning environment (i.e. combining CALL and face-to-face instruction) from the students' perspective, and also, ultimately, to prove the viability of such a blended environment to integrate a learner's variables and differences. The importance of incorporating this theoretical model lies in the fact that it can integrate a number of other similar research efforts, studies and actions.

The book contains such a wealth of information from such a variety of sources that it sometimes becomes difficult for the reader to fully process and handle the interpretations and conclusions offered. This sometimes makes reading the book a complex process, despite its coherent structure and articulate discourse. Not surprisingly, the book is the result of a great amount of time devoted to the theoretical review and investigations carried out by the author. Thus, the effort that the non-specialist reader has to make to follow certain parts of the book can by no means be considered as a weak point. The author herself acknowledges the density and magnitude of the research topics covered throughout the book. She also recognises some weak points in the research, such as the small sample of some of the empirical studies, which is a disadvantage in terms of validity, or the difficulty to interpret some contradictory results in certain studies included in Part 3. In addition to this, the only thing that we miss in the book is a more detailed pedagogical description of the CALL application (including its structure and features). It can be argued that this description could be outside the scope of the research topic; nevertheless, such a description could have clarified some issues in relation to CALL design features from the point of view of the learners' individual differences.

If we take a look at the book as a whole, it carries out a global scrutiny of the language learning process within a specific CALL (as well as blended-learning) environment, with an in-depth, comprehensive and enlightening investigation that ranges from the very first action of considering relevant theoretical issues to the final stages of CALL implementation, use and evaluation, through a number of key intermediate phases, such as the theoretically-informed development of CALL materials or the assessment of the learners' profile and the contextual background. It is certainly a very pleasant experience to find studies of such a broad scope and, simultaneously, with such a coherent research methodology embedded in CALL literature.

Reference

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Top

Article

Practicing Pronunciation: Will Voice XML do for language learners what HTML did for collaborators?

Abstract: This paper considers the utility of the Voice Extensible Markup Language (Voice XML) for language learning. In particular, this article considers whether Voice XML might become as popular as HTML. First, this paper discusses the surprising popularity of HTML, which provides contextual information useful for considering the potential of Voice XML. Second, this article discusses two voice scripts in order to demonstrate Voice XML tags and features. The first example script concerns voice synthesis only whereas the second script utilizes both voice synthesis and voice recognition. In order to gain insight into the utility of Voice XML for instructional applications, the second voice script can be accessed by language learners in order to practice pronouncing words in English. Technically, each voice script is a text file containing Voice XML tags. Once the file containing a Voice XML script is stored on a web server and a telephone number linked to the file, a language learner can use a telephone to practice pronouncing words. Those implementation details are considered in the third section of this paper, which identifies one particular system that permits developers to test and deploy Voice XML scripts free of charge. Lastly, this article concludes with a discussion of issues concerning the utility of Voice XML relative to HTML.

Keywords: practicing pronunciation, voice synthesis, voice recognition

1. Introduction

Much to the surprise of Tim Berners-Lee (2000), who developed the technologies that led to the World Wide Web, people who wanted to share information for the purpose of collaboration were willing to learn the Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) and use it to develop web pages. Berners-Lee expected that computer programmers would develop software enabling web page development without knowledge of the underlying hypertext markup language. Although that eventually did come true, early adopters did not wait for the arrival of such software. Instead, developers seeking to share information learned how to use the tags in the hypertext markup language in order to create web pages. Given the absence of software for creating voice applications using Voice XML, the open standard developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (2006), one may wonder whether developers will learn the tags in Voice XML in order to deploy voice applications.

More specifically, this paper considers whether language teachers will be willing to learn the Voice Extensible Markup Language (VXML) and use it to help people learn how to pronounce words precisely? In order to introduce voice scripting, crucial Voice XML tags are discussed in the next section of this paper. The third section identifies a system that can be used to test and deploy Voice XML scripts. The concluding section of this article returns to the fundamental question of this paper, which calls for an assessment of the utility of Voice XML relative to HTML.

2. Creating Audio Scripts Using Voice XML

In this section we present two Voice XML scripts. Prior experience using a markup language, such as HTML, LaTeX, or nroff, would be helpful, but is not required for creating Voice XML scripts. The first example demonstrates how to create a script for speech output only. The second example script demonstrates an interactive voice application for language learning.

The first example script appears below.

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<vxml version="2.0">
<form>
<block>
Hello, EuroCall participant. We created this script only to demonstrate a
simple Voice XML script.
</block>
</form>
</vxml>
```

The first line of the script is required for configuration purposes. The rest of the script contains three pairs of tags, <vxml></vxml>, <form></form>, and <block></block>. The <vxml></vxml> pair of tags identifies the script as a Voice XML application, much like the <html></html> pair of tags identifies a script as an HTML application. Just as in HTML, where all tags appear between <html> and </html>, all Voice XML tags appear between <vxml> and </vxml>. In Voice XML, a dialog is enclosed within the <form> and </form> tags. In the fist example, the "dialog" is actually a monologue because the only pair of tags within the <form> and </form> tags is the <block></block> pairing, which directs the text-to-speech engine to speak the words between the <block> and </block> tags. Hence, the first application speaks the words: "Hello, EuroCall participant. We created this script only to demonstrate a simple Voice XML script."

The second example script, which appears below, permits language learners to practice pronouncing words related to households. As in the first example, the script below includes the <vxml> </vxml>, <form> </form>, and <block> </block> tags. In addition, the script below introduces six new pairs of tags, specifically , , , , , and . Further, the script below includes a tag and the <if> <elseif> <else> set of tags.

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<vxml version="2.0">
<form id="HouseDialog">
<block>Practice saying the following household words one at a time.</block>

<field name="SpokenWord">
<prompt>
Say either: Door, window, floor, wall, roof, living room, or done
</prompt>

<grammar>
Door | window | floor | wall | roof | living room | done
</grammar>

<noinput>
No word detected. <reprompt/>
</noinput>

<nomatch>
Your pronunciation was not clear enough. Try again.<reprompt/>
</nomatch>

<filled>
<if cond="SpokenWord=='Door'">
Good. That is the correct pronunciation for door. <reprompt/>
<elseif cond="SpokenWord=='window'"/>
Good. That is the correct pronunciation for window. <reprompt/>
<elseif cond="SpokenWord=='floor'"/>
Good. That is the correct pronunciation for floor. <reprompt/>
<elseif cond="SpokenWord=='wall'"/>
Good. That is the correct pronunciation for wall. <reprompt/>
<elseif cond="SpokenWord=='roof'"/>
Good. That is the correct pronunciation for roof. <reprompt/>
<elseif cond="SpokenWord=='living room'"/>
Good. That is the correct pronunciation for living room. <reprompt/>
<else/>
Good bye.
</if>
</filled>

</field>
</form>
</vxml>
```

Dialogs, whether in human communication or in Voice XML scripts, are interactive. Typically, dialogs involve speaking, listening, processing, and replying. The dialog in the second example script fulfills those four functions. Recall that a Voice XML dialog appears within the <form> and </form> tags. In the second example, the <form> tag includes an optional ID parameter, which is useful for naming dialogs (especially when a Voice XML script contains more than one dialog). The dialog in the second example script is called the "HouseDialog" because language learners would use the script to practice pronouncing words pertaining to a house. The dialog begins with the text-to-speech engine stating: "Practice saying the following household words one at a time." Then the script includes a <field> tag, which includes a *name* parameter. That parameter identifies the variable name (SpokenWord), which is used to accept input from the learner. After prompting the learner to speak particular words, by stating the words between the <prompt> </prompt> tags, the system listens for a response.

In particular, the system listens for the utterances, which are typically words, specified within the <grammar> and </grammar> tags. In this example, the system seeks to recognize the words *door, window, floor, wall, roof, living room,* and *done,* all of which appear within the <grammar> </grammar> tags, separated by the | character. When the voice recognition system detects an utterance in the grammar, the variable name "SpokenWord" is assigned the word or words spoken. Given the example script, the system then executes the <if> <elseif> <else> statement, which appears within the <filled> and </filled> tags. In this tutorial program, the system provides positive reinforcement when the learner clearly states one of the household words specified in the grammar. The system then restates the prompt, and awaits more input. When the learner says the word, done, the system exits.

In interactive audio applications, two circumstances may be encountered that fail to populate the variable identified by the *name* parameter in a <field> tag. First, if the learner is silent, the system will time out and run the code within the <noinput> and </noinput> tags. In the "HouseDialog," the text-to-speech engine states: "No input detected" and then restates the prompt. This causes the system to await input once again. Alternatively, the voice input of the learner may not match a word or words identified within the <grammar> and </grammar> tags. When this circumstance arises, the system executes the code with the <nomatch> and </nomatch> tags. In the "HouseDialog" example, the text-to-speech engine states: "Your pronunciation was not clear enough. Try again." The prompt is then restated and the learner gets another opportunity to practice pronouncing household words.

While functional, the example scripts provide few insights into the robust nature of Voice XML. The cumbersome <if> <elseif> <else> series of tags could be replaced by a sequence of <menu> </menu> and <choice/> tags, which is similar to replacing a complex if/elseif/else statement with a case statement if programming in C, Java, or Pascal, for instance. Further, a Voice XML developer could replace the long <if> <elseif> <else> structure within the <filled> and </filled> tags completely with the following: Good. That is the correct pronunciation for <value expr="SpokenWord"/>. Also, branching is common in Voice XML scripts. Often, after detecting a word in the grammar, a Voice XML script will direct execution to another dialog in the same Voice XML file or execution sometimes proceeds to a dialog in a different scripts. Also, with respect to the diversity of programming options, the grammar perceived by the voice recognition system can be as sophisticated as any grammar specified in Augmented Backus Naur Form (ABNF). An introductory Voice XML tutorial is available at the World Wide Web Consortium pages (Raggett 2001).

3. Implementing Audio Applications Using Voice XML Scripts
A company called *VoiceGenie* offers a series of Voice XML tutorials and a free service for testing Voice XML scripts. Recently, *VoiceGenie* merged with *Genesys,* which is a subsidiary of *Alcatel.* Fortunately, the free service is still available at http://developer.voicegenie.com. To test or deploy a Voice XML script, the developer must complete a two-step process. First, the Voice XML script must be copied to a web server. Second, using *VoiceGenie's* extension manager software, the URL of the Voice XML script is associated with a telephone extension number. To do this, the developer logs into the *VoiceGenie* system; selects *Tools;* selects *Extension Manager;* types or pastes the URL of the Voice XML script into the text field; and clicks the *Add* button. This results immediately in the assignment of a telephone extension number to the URL of the Voice XML script. Then users or learners, in this case, can call 416-736-9731 and state the extension number in order to run the Voice XML application. The extension numbers for the first and second example scripts are 357005 are 357006 respectively.

4. Conclusion
In this paper we are asking the question: Might Voice XML become as popular as HTML? The work of Rogers (2003) serves to remind us of the importance of simplicity when considering the diffusion of an innovation. With respect to rudimentary HTML and Voice XML coding, the simplicity of scripting is similar. Just as one needs to learn only a small number of HTML tags in order to display text on a web page, the first example above demonstrates that one needs to learn only a small number of Voice XML tags in order to output audio. With respect to interactive applications, processing an HTML form requires a separate server side script written in Perl, C, PHP, or some other language. In contrast, as evident in the second script above, Voice XML tags necessary for populating fields and processing user input are entered into a single script. In this respect, Voice XML scripting is no more difficult than HTML coding, which bodes well for the diffusion of voice applications using Voice XML. Of concern, however, is the deployment of voice applications versus web pages.

High quality web browsers, which are widely available at no cost, reliably render HTML content. Today, the same cannot be said about the availability of free voice synthesis and voice recognition software. High quality voice synthesis and even low vocabulary speech recognition are difficult programming problems (Jurafsky & Martin 2000). Yet, some software exists, as discussed in the previous section of this paper. Given the potential for improved voice synthesis and voice recognition software, the question about the utility of Voice XML, relative to HTML, remains open. While the past decade saw the extraordinary rise of the web, due to high speed and high quality HTML rendering, perhaps this decade will see a proliferation of audio applications using Voice XML for language learners and others.

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Top

Report on EUROCALL Regional Event

First Valencian Workshop on Computer Assisted Language Learning:
"Authoring Tools for Web-based CALL"

26 - 27 January 2007
Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, Spain

Workshop Themes and Objectives
This 2-day workshop was organised by Rafael Seiz and Ana Gimeno and hosted by the Department of Applied Linguistics, Polytechnic University of

Valencia (UPV) within the framework of EUROCALL's regional events. It was co-funded by the Valencian Regional Government (Consellería de Empresa, Universidad y Ciencia de la Generalitat Valenciana), the Spanish Ministry of Education and the UPV itself. Six companies sponsored the event and exhibited their products: Macmillan ELT, Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, Pearson Longman, Auralog and Intel-lang SL. The workshop was validated by the Valencian Regional Government's Council of Education as an officially recognised teacher-training event.

The workshop was a scientific meeting that gathered experts at an international level with the purpose of fostering debate and encouraging a dynamic and interactive exchange of know-how revolving around a number of topics relating to the design, development, use and evaluation of authoring tools for Web-based language learning. This general theme was dealt with from a dual perspective, i.e. taking into account both theoretical and practical issues, since each tool was presented academically as well as being demonstrated on a hands-on basis. In order to meet the objective of disseminating Web-based CALL authoring tools, the event bought together in Valencia, for the first time ever, key experts closely connected to the development and implementation of the major dedicated CALL authoring tools that are currently available worldwide.

Each speaker, consequently, presented the authoring tool that they have developed or implemented from a triple point of view: (1) discussion of the theoretical background and rationale underpinning the development and pedagogical use of the authoring tool; (2) a hands-on workshop or show-and-tell presentation to illustrate the use of the software; and (3) a round table and open debate with the audience's active participation. The design and development of Web-based language learning materials is a field in constant evolution and change, and is currently a priority, especially with the advent of the recently defined European Higher Education Area. In our view, the theoretical and practical sessions to a large extent contributed to the improvement of the efficient implementation of emerging Information and Communications Technologies (ICT), by disseminating new opportunities for teachers and practitioners to create and use Web-based CALL materials and tasks. In this sense, the workshop also involved technology transfer between university and non-university language learning institutions. The world of multimedia CALL development and use is in need of meetings such as this, where we can explore new ways of making sound pedagogical use of ICT and exchange views and expertise with fellow specialists.

Participants

Over 125 participants attended and took an active part in the workshop. Most of these were language teachers belonging to the different levels of the education system, from primary to university and adult education. There were also computer scientists, CALL researchers and research students, CALL developers and stakeholders from educational institutions. Therefore, it was a multidisciplinary meeting, which contributed toward promoting an enriching debate and discussion from a large range of perspectives.

Summary of the presentations

"MALTED: Adding pedagogic value to the authoring process". Paul Bangs (Independent Educational Technology Consultant, UK)
http://www.malted.com/

As Paul Bangs was unfortunately unable to attend the event due to unforeseen circumstances, the MALTED presentation and workshop were delivered by Pedro José Serrano (Educational Consultant at the Teacher Training Centre in Ciudad Real, Spain)

MALTED (Multimedia Authoring for Language Tutors and Educational Development) was developed with two main objectives in mind: putting language tutors in charge of developing e-learning materials; and avoiding the re-invention of many wheels. Created with help from the European Commission's Framework 4 research programme, and refined and extended by the Spanish Ministry of Education and the Language Centre, University College London, it offers a powerful, completely free open software development platform for language teachers everywhere. There are many authoring systems and tools, mostly falling into the categories of generic (Director, Authorware, Shockwave, Flash) or specific systems for language learning (Fun with Texts, Hot Potatoes, TaskMagic). MALTED crosses this divide, offering many facilities useful for other subject areas and also straddles the levels of difficulty in its use - not a "pick up and go" system, nevertheless it is much easier to use than generic tools. It uses Java to output XML files, now the platform of choice for learning systems worldwide. Using an applet, programs can be accessed remotely from intranet or the Internet. As it develops further, there will be additions, such as a Learner Management System, and access to a remote Asset Base of downloadable learning objects. This work deals in passing with the extensive facilities of MALTED, (downloadable from http://malted.cnice.mec.es), and then discusses the perceived advantages which accrue from its use, justifying the initial effort needed to become familiar with the tools. MALTED enables the creation of many different learning activities, the breadth of which would justify its use, but its real added value lies elsewhere, as indeed it would be faster to create, say, a multiple choice activity, using other tools. It adds a much enhanced flexibility - on any screen an object can be added which when clicked offers a wide range of actions, a powerful addition to the system, unique among the "simpler" authoring tools. But MALTED goes much further. All the activities can be linked together in a course. At the simplest level this could be a linear presentation, or placing items in a menu. However, its true potential is realised by linking the "frames" so as to benefit the experience of the language learner, who can be offered different experiences according to his or her performance - branching on the basis of conditions - score, time, variables - or simply on learner choice. In this way, the system allows for learner self-evaluation on a formative basis, and thus conforms to modern pedagogic theories for e-learning. This pedagogic power, placed in the hands of the tutor/developer, allows MALTED to offer an added value which places it at the forefront of authoring systems for language learning.

"Extremadura's most recent educational bet: ATENEX". Pedro Calbarro (Regional Education Council of Extremadura, Spain)
http://atenex.educarex.es/back/index.php

ATENEX is a platform for the creation and management of interactive multimedia materials and for the assessment and evaluation of the student's learning process. The features of the tool are:
· Modular structure open to constant growth in terms of its possibilities. It is a recently created tool that is open to suggestions and demands by the educational community in order to improve its use and functionality.
· It is a tool to share; its materials are easily edited, and it is ready to be included within other e-learning platforms, since it is compatible with standards such as SCORM and IMS.
· It is a multi-platform tool, ready for use both online and offline.
· Its main objective is user-friendliness: use of a very simple yet highly effective interface and template.
· It enables different user profiles with varying degrees of editing permissions.
· Adapted to diversity: different itineraries are possible for different learning paces.
· Different online help facilities are available: help forums and Frequently Asked Questions.

"Creating contents with ATENEX for learners of English in the Region of Madrid". Alejandra Velasco (Local Education Council of Madrid, Spain)

The hands-on workshop demonstrated the use and potential of the tool, dealing with several topics that were integrated to create a real learning unit with the help of the tool:
a) Origins and background of the project.
b) The project's rationale.
c) The choice of the tool.
d) Development of the process of content creation.
e) Problems and questions.
f) Results.

"Beyond the interface: toward generic and dedicated object models for authoring tools". Jozef Colpaert (Antwerp University, Belgium)
http://www.linguapolis.be/

In his presentation, Colpaert explained why authoring tools should comply with two -at first sight- contradictory requirements. On the one hand, authoring tools -or some specific components- should offer sufficient linguistic-didactic functionalities. They should be dedicated, meaning that they should be

developed by designers for language learning and teaching purposes. On the other hand, the underlying concepts, models and data structures should be as generic as possible: they should be portable, exchangeable and reusable. He also presented two models which can be seen as generic and dedicated building blocks for authoring systems: the Interactive Document Model (IDM) and the Entreposage Universel Model (EUM). The IDM is a generic class, an object model, which can be used for developing dedicated online applications. The EUM model is a generic database structure for guaranteeing a) easy authoring, b) rapid implementation, and c) reusability of content. Both models were illustrated with examples of ongoing and completed LINGUAPOLIS projects.

"Hot Potatoes: Creación y difusión de actividades para la enseñanza de idiomas". José Luis Chamero García (Teacher Training Centre in Puertollano, Spain)
http://www.halfbakedsoftware.com/

The following topics were dealt with in relation to the popular suite of programs, Hot Potatoes, created by Stewart Arneil and Martin Holmes of the University of Victoria, Canada, to publish educational materials, especially exercises and tests on the web.
· General features of the application.
· Possible exercise types: JCloze (gap filling), JMix (order parts of a sentence), JCross (crosswords), JQuiz (open answers or multiple choice), JMatch (matching)...
· Brief examples of activities created with the help of the tool.
· Pedagogical potential for the language teacher.
· Hot Potatoes community of users: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hotpotatoesusers

"InGenio: A dedicated CALL authoring shell, content manager and courseware delivery platform". Ana Gimeno Sanz (Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, Spain)
http://camilleweb.upv.es/camille

Proyecto InGenio was triggered by the will to design a completely on-line CALL dedicated authoring shell that would allow language teachers from around the world to design their own materials -according to their student's needs and requirements-, create a database with these materials -thus making them available to other users-, and automatically convert them into learner-ready materials. The project therefore has two basic outcomes. On the one hand, a language-independent, on-line multimedia CALL authoring shell, and on the other, an on-line learning environment offering the courseware designed and created within the *InGenio* authoring tool. The *InGenio* authoring tool currently provides language teachers with 15 fully operative exercise templates, as well as a number of templates to create reference materials such as grammar notes, use of language, cultural information and so forth, which can be associated individually to exercises or accessed as independent tools from within the course. In addition, *InGenio* allows us to create monolingual or multilingual sound-enhanced glossaries and dictionaries. Progress reports can also be called up at any point during the learning process since an assessment facility is permanently available in all courses. The data is automatically transferred to the *InGenio* server while the materials are in use. Students can therefore monitor their progress during the course of their work. Tutors may, if they wish, also create exams and tests. All the exercise templates include a number of common features such as limiting the number of attempts to complete an exercise, limiting the time for its completion, assigning individual values to the activities, etc., all of which allow tutors to monitor their students' progress throughout the course.

"The I4LL -Integrated Interactive Independent Internet-based Language Learning- authoring tool and Learning Management System". Virginia González García (Universidad de Valencia, Spain)
http://talenc29.rug.ac.be/welcomeweb/

The I4LL authoring tool (Integrated Interactive Independent Internet-based Language Learning) was developed within the framework of the EU-funded WELCOME Project. This tool comprises 9 predefined templates that allow language teachers to design interactive multimedia exercises of various types: multiple choice, gap filling, reordering, open-ended questions, etc. All of the templates incorporate the possibility of adding different feedback formats, as well as providing scores on student performance. The tool generates XML files and runs on a Java Runtime Environment, whilst requiring Quicktime for sound and video reproduction. Courses are generated in an isolated and independent way, although they can be integrated into the I4LL eLearning Environment, thus enabling online access. This management system is also furnished with communication tools, reference tools (dictionaries, grammar books...), and personalised student evaluation tools.

"HAUPA: An instructor-oriented tool". Antonio Hervás Jorge (Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, Spain)

HAUPA is an authoring tool for the elaboration and publication of didactic materials for distance learning. It allows the learning materials generated by teachers to be incorporated into the tool in a simple and user-friendly manner, by using a familiar environment, within a pre-set yet flexible structure, and then into an eLearning platform accessible via the Internet. The tool includes a pre-established structure to organise content so as to guarantee a series of common components in all the materials: presentation of objectives, theory tutorials, pools of practical exercise, bibliography, etc. The created materials can have different formats. This tool has been widely used at the Polytechnic University of Valencia to develop a large range of courses.

"Authoring in a Blended Language Learning Environment. A Challenge for Teacher Autonomy". Kurt Kohn (Universität Tübingen, Germany)
http://www.teloslearning.com/index.html

Teachers have always been able to create (some of) their own learning material -and traditional (i.e. analogue) technologies (e.g. type writer, broadcast/TV, audio/video recorder, Xerox) have always offered possibilities for pedagogic authoring. This has changed with the advent of the computer and multimedia/web content. In his presentation, Kohn argued that language teachers need to be in autonomous pedagogic control of the content process, in particular with regard to the requirements of task-based learning and authentication. Teachers need to be AUTHORS! Otherwise they will not be able to make best use of the potential of content-based eLearning in a Blended Language Learning environment. This was the background to Kohn's presentation of Telos Language Partner, a template-based software for multimedia and web-based language learning, testing and authoring. TLP-supported learning activities range from video explorations to dialogue practice, from text comprehension and production to lexical and grammatical explanations and exercises. All tasks can be made available with or without (model) solutions. Due to a special interface between Telos Language Partner and the Open Source eLearning platform Moodle, TLP learning and testing packages can be pedagogically integrated with other content or communication-based eLearning activities. In the lecture session of the presentation, Kohn provided an overview of Telos Language Partner and how its authoring functions can be exploited in Blended Language Learning scenarios supported by Moodle.

Workshop Conclusions and Follow up
The workshop clearly showed a widespread concern to make a sound pedagogical use of technology when it comes to creating language learning materials for the Web (as in any other environment). Institutions should encourage the use of educational technology because it implies an added pedagogical value, and preferably complemented by different teacing and learning formats, rather than simply because it is "new", fashionable or popular. But in order to take full advantage of the technology, language teachers have to be properly trained in workshops enabling hands-on sessions, such as this one. Issues such as the portability, reusability and usability of the learning materials created by the different tools were put forward repeatedly all through the workshop.

The organisers are now in the process of editikng a book with the papers delivered at the workshop and the results of the meeting and are considering the possibility of organising further CALL workshops with different topics at the same university.

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Top

Events Calendar

For information on events, please refer to http://www.eurocall-languages.org/resources/calendar.html, which is regularly updated.

Top

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Site designed and maintained by Fred Riley
Last updated January 1, 2014