



European Association for Computer-Assisted Language Learning

EUROCALL Newsletter

Issue number 4, January 2004

Editor: Ana Gimeno

ISSN: 1695-2618

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ReCALL Journal

The forthcoming issue of *ReCALL* (Vol. 16, Part 1) will be distributed to EUROCALL members in May/June 2004. 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: d.j.thompson@hull.ac.uk.

All articles are considered by an international panel of referees. Please see the [notes for contributors](#).



Reports on EUROCALL Special Interest Groups

InSTIL/ICALL Symposium 2004 on NLP and Speech Technologies in Advanced Language Learning Systems VENICE (Italy) 17-19 June 2004

EUROCALL's **InSTIL** (Integrating Speech Technology in Learning) SIG, which gathers researchers and practitioners interested in using computers in speech-enabled CALL and in the domain of pronunciation in the widest sense of the word, will hold its forthcoming symposium in Venice from June 17 to 19, 2004. The symposium will take place at the Auditorium Santa Margherita of the Università Ca' Foscari in Venice and is being organised by [Rodolfo Delmonte](#) of the Laboratorio di Linguistica Computazionale del Dipartimento di Scienze del Linguaggio and EUROCALL's Regional Representative in Italy, among other colleagues.

GOALS AND SCOPE OF THE SYMPOSIUM

The scope of the symposium is to join together people working in the two neighbouring and often overlapping research fields of Natural Language and Speech Technologies, oriented towards Language Learning and Tutoring.

Thanks to latest remarkable advances in Natural Language Processing (NLP) research, there has been an increasing interest among researchers in the implementation of NLP-based educational applications for both large-scale assessment and classroom instruction. Educational applications have been developed across a variety of subject domains, among others, in automated evaluation of free-responses and intelligent tutoring.

We feel that research in Artificial Intelligence, Computational Linguistics, Corpus-Driven and Corpus Linguistics, Formal Linguistics, Machine Aided Translation, Machine Translation, Natural Language Interfaces, Natural Language Processing, Theoretical Linguistics has produced results which have proven, are proving and will prove very useful in the field of Computer Assisted Language Learning.

Research areas may concern not only Second Language (L2) oriented research, but also First Language (L1) learning in the presence of language deficiencies - deafness, dyslexia - and sign language. In more general terms, we are targeting intelligent tutoring systems that incorporate state-of-the-art NLP methods to evaluate response content, using either text- or speech-based analyses.

The three-day Symposium is supported by InSTIL's three parent associations, [CALICO](#) (Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium), EUROCALL and [ISCA](#) (International Speech Communication Association), as well as EUROCALL's SIG on [Language Processing](#). It builds on the excellence and excitement of the ISCA workshop, STILL '98, held in Marholmen, Sweden, and on InSTIL events from 2000 to 2002.

InSTIL 2004 brings together, for the first time, the two traditions of what is generally referred to as Intelligent CALL or ICALL, hence the twin title of ICALL 2004. The Symposium is a unique opportunity for scholars in the language processing side of the CALL interface to meet their speech technology colleagues. It is also a great opportunity for anyone interested in what we consider the future of the learning interface, including on the Web, to see the very best products and prototypes exhibited. In the warm atmosphere of the June Venetian sun, this event should not be missed! For full details, see <http://project.cgm.unive.it/> and <http://www.instil.org/>

IMPORTANT DATES

- Workshop Paper Submission Deadline: Feb 21, 2004
- Notification of Acceptance: April 21, 2004
- Camera Ready Papers: May 21, 2004
- Workshop Dates: June 17-19, 2004

Philippe Delcloque
UMIST (UK)

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Projects

DISSEMINATE

<http://www.disseminate.org.uk/>

DISSEMINATE is a mnemonic acronymic vehicle capable of brand recognition to support a set of development principles for what some have now referred to as the emerging science of Courseware Engineering (Marshall 1997). Above all, DISSEMINATE is an active verb which implies that the proponents may wish to follow this with definite planned actions which may occur simultaneously and in a co-ordinated fashion in all parts of the world. Although the concept of the project is "authorability", it is seen by its members as the sum of the key elements described below, yet considering the definition of each component proposed as open and flexible. It is not meant to be prescriptive and to create new constraints; quite on the contrary, it may lead to substitutions and refinements to suit individual authors and collaborators.

D stands for **Distributed** so that the fruits and tools of the project/movement are widely available and accessible across disciplines, nations, platforms and sectors.

I stands for **Integrated** so that the component parts do not act as non-compatible entities, but indeed integrate with both existing and future technology but also pedagogy. This also applies to possible intelligent functionality enhancements.

S stands for **Stable** or robust and durable, perhaps the hardest attribute in the context of a development system with seriously dispersed ownership, but once again we may be guided by the relative success of Linux which now boasts millions of users world-wide across three operating systems.

S for **Superimposed** in the sense that the development is highly likely to be placed above the level of the Web browser without suffering from its limitations. This might be labeled the top down version of DISSEMINATE (from the Web down), whereas the original intention was bottom up through the construction of a "vertical ladder" which would take authors from conventional authoring systems used to produce DISSEMINATE modules with full Web-Compatibility. This is indeed the path which many major producers of authoring programs have chosen including Authorware, Director and Question Mark.

E for **Evolutionary**, perhaps one of the most important attributes to avoid the pitfalls of development which dies when a particular operating system or authoring program falls out of favour or becomes technologically obsolete. This is encouraged by open coding.

M for **Modulaware** responding to the evolution of modern computing away from monolithic multifunctional large entities towards ultimate discrete object orientation where the primary unit of construction or building block might be the WebScreen or exerciseware module. In either context, data and assets would be entered easily and separately whilst the frame would contain all functionalities relying on core web technology (Java applets, Perl code/scripts, Javascripts and CGI forms, Functionality Plug Ins including Active X) all controlled within non compiled authorable HTML and platform independent virtual byte-code. The importance of the module is that it reintroduces the useful time-saving paradigmatic dimension, and stands alone for small developments.

I for **Interactive** may be seen as more than a truism in the sense that much existing web-enhanced learning might be said to encourage more passive acquisition given the perceived technical limitations of the medium. As interactive learning has now been the norm in many classrooms for several decades, it is important not to lose the foundations established through the best disc-based courseware. In the current state of the art, conventional CALL courseware is a great deal more interactive than Internet-based CALL courseware.

N for **Networked**: In CAL(L), the last years of this millenium and progresses into the third millenium might be said to have placed emphasis on the prominence of networks rather than stand-alone formats. This is mirrored into the real world where the delivery of products increasingly involves such structures which allow just in time distant access.

A for **Authorable**: always core within this concept and development architecture, this feature is one of the key elements, although not new, in the sense that it allows flexible rapid customisation and the much needed adaptation and instant error corrections sadly absent in fixed and closed systems. This is a movement away from obsolete staticity, inflexibility and proprietary tendencies.

T for **Tracking**: Although tracking learners is rarely done for a whole variety of reasons (time, ethics, etc...), it is the necessary condition behind good monitoring and communication with the end-user, as well as the essential research instrument behind quantitative and qualitative evaluation. In the current state of knowledge, tracking may require the use of separate proprietary software although it is implemented in systems such as WebCT which will serve as a model and possible framework within which to situate DISSEMINATE.

E must obviously end the acronym with the word **Education** although some might prefer the more fashionable Edutainment. There is certainly a well-documented need for the fun element in courseware which has mostly been implemented by commercial companies culminating recently in the much praised Oscar series (Language Publications Interactive, 1997, Oscar Series of 'Virtual Reality' Adventure CD-ROMs).

The basic difference between DISSEMINATE and existing CALL courseware authoring tools is that its elements will all function independently and are optional. The suite of tools will simply be a menu of modules linked together and to a database, as well as to communication structures. The suite will be built from the "ground up", forming a collaborative framework which other tutor-authors could expand upon in a development paralleling Linux.

The DISSEMINATE story is hopefully about to happen via commercial funding. Seedcorn funding should soon be obtained which will allow the then public and private sector development of the authoring system and the first courseware elements inspired by the approach. The aim is to revolutionise Web-based Language Learning which one still hesitates to label under the well known notional acronym WELL (Web Enhanced Language Learning). It is hoped that DISSEMINATE also makes the web speak and hear as elements of the best speech interface (VoiceXML driven) are incorporated into the authoring tool.

References:

Marshall, I.M. (1997) Thesis for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, University of Abertay Dundee.

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Recommended website

**JOHN'S ESL COMMUNITY - ENGLISH
INTERACTIVE**

<http://www.johnsesl.com>

[[Site at a glance](#)] [[Site contact information](#)] [[Site description and analysis](#)] [[Technical and pedagogical summary](#)]

Site at a glance

John's ESL Community - English Interactive is an interactive website with a double portal for students and teachers. It offers a wide range of learning and teaching resources, with over 350 activities for students, including quizzes, games and exercises of many kinds, as well as plenty of class resources for ESL teachers. It is claimed to be updated almost daily. There is the possibility of obtaining a free e-mail account. Content is sorted by communicative skills and linguistic topics. It was set up in 1995 by John Erskin. It makes wide use of JavaScript interactive resources. Its overall objective is to provide general linguistic practice at different levels of general English and in different formats. English is also the vehicular language for the whole site. Multimedia includes audio and graphics, but no video. Plug-ins, software and files in general are easy to access and download.

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Site description and analysis

Although the site does not include a site map as such, there is a lot of meta-site information giving a wealth of details about the developer and the resource itself. The website has been clearly divided into two parallel sections (for students and for teachers) from the very first welcoming screen. A brief outline of the site's sections follows:

Student sections:

- Linguistic skills (Vocabulary, Reading, Writing, Listening, Grammar, Idioms, Quotes)
- Quizzes (organized by type: Short answer, Cloze, Yes/No, Multiple Choice)
- Vocabulary, Scrambled Text, Flash Cards, Matching, Listening)
- Holidays (reading pages to learn about American Holidays)
- Games (sorted by type)
- Riddles (sorted by topic)
- E-cards (possibility of sending real postcards to people)
- E-mail (possibility of opening an exclusive e-mail account for free)
- Links (a place to view categorized links and submit links onto the page).

Teacher sections: similar to the above plus a plentiful collection of teaching ideas and plans, as well as on-line tools to develop activities (including a dedicated and free class website).

After the user accesses the student section, the screen displays four distinct areas. At the top, on the right-hand side there is information about the site, a links section with the possibility for the student to add and organise new links, and a facility to provide a new e-mail account with the extension <erskin@johnsesl.com>. The central part of the screen is occupied by an explanatory text about the chosen section at a given time, and links to exercise sections. Both sides of the screen layout include columns of hyperlinks to language skills and exercise formats (on the left-hand side) and at actual exercises or collections of tasks (on the right). These hyperlinks at both sides of the page lead us to different collections of actual exercises on the central part of the screen. Consequently, the student can move around the website in a non-linear way, making choices concerning language skills and exercise types, depending on what he or she wishes to practise. For all language skills, there is a section devoted to useful learning strategies to develop them, some of which are very interactive (e.g. vocabulary list builders).

The teachers' section has a similar layout and structure, but with different parts. In the left-hand side column, the teacher can find a "class web site" login facility which allows for the self-construction of lesson plans. Available teacher resources include activity generators (Java-programmed) that show a high degree of interaction, printable worksheets and classroom activities, as well as links to teaching resources of various kinds (Bookstore, professional associations, world news, etc.). Both students and teachers can easily interact and send messages and feedback to the site developer, by filling in online forms.

Synchronous communication is not catered for within the resource, but the degree of interaction is quite high. Links are plentiful, coherently organised by topic or purpose, and regularly updated. Detailed charts about performance are sometimes available. Metalinguistic feedback, in the form of comments and explanations, is occasionally provided.

All language skills are treated, with the exception of speaking, which is not present. There is also the possibility of skills integration, namely Reading/Writing and Listening/Reading, for instance.

The treatment of linguistic skills and components is as follows:

- Phonetics: Perception versus production exercises. Discrimination of sounds (minimal pairs). Exercise types: multiple choice.
- Grammar: Direct (explicit) instruction as well as indirect (implicit) instruction. Grammatical consciousness-raising is promoted. Inductive (examples + rule inference) and deductive (rules + practice with examples) approach. Formal explanation of rules. Practice of structures by analogy rather than explanation. Provision of opportunities to use and observe the language in real contexts. Exercise types: multiple choice, gap-filling, drag-and-drop, matching, open-input tasks, tutorials and games.
- Vocabulary: Lexical fields included. Strategies for the deduction of meaning. Learning by lexical association and grouping. Graphic, multimedia or contextual cues and support. The treatment of vocabulary is contextualized sometimes. Mnemotechnic strategies. Encouragement of active and personal vocabulary compilation by students. Presentation of collocations and expressions (in addition to isolated words). Perceptive (to recognize) as well as productive (to use) approach to vocabulary. Oral or written treatment. Exercise types: multiple choice, open-input, games and tutorials.
- Reading comprehension: Bottom-up and top-down approach to comprehension. Possibility of gradual approach to the text. Graphic or multimedia support. Pre-reading exercises. Use of information transfer. Possibility of extensive practice. Predicting, inferring and guessing from context. Reading is seen as a highly interactive process. Exercise types: multiple choice, gap-filling, open-input, games, tutorials, exploratory tasks and text reconstruction.
- Listening Comprehension: Bottom-up versus top-down approach to comprehension. Practice of the phonetic (perceptual) versus interpretative (comprehension) component. Connections between the written and spoken word reinforced and promoted sometimes. Exercise types: multiple choice, gap-filling, games.
- Writing: Focus on product rather than the process. Practice derived from reading. Levels of sentence, and text. Controlled composition. Exercise types: open-input and games.

There is a tendency towards authenticity in tasks, although many of them are clearly pedagogical and linguistically oriented. The coverage of linguistic topics is quite wide, including discourse, syntax, lexis and morphology, as well as information transfer tasks.

Regarding the role played by the computer, following the distinction made in 1980 by Taylor, it acts as a tutor (providing linguistic practice, guidance and feedback), as a tool (to help the student and the teacher with their learning and teaching activities) and as a tutee (because it is possible to feed plenty of data into

the online resource). The linguistic input (i.e. the materials available to the students) is made comprehensible by means of explanations of words or concepts, attached audio files, pictures and graphics. The pedagogical approach to contents is analytical, rather than synthetic, and the website allows for the construction of meaning and learning paths by the students themselves, which implies a constructivist learning approach, instead of a linear one.

Plenty of help and reference aids for learning are provided, together with lots of examples, demonstrations and explanations. Grammar is contextualised, and linguistic practice can be controlled, contextualised and communicative.

Motivation is encouraged through the use of games, the provision of a wide variety of exercises, exploratory activities, or development of web skills (e-mail, web page creation...).

Language awareness is also promoted. In addition, this comes hand in hand with a strong focus on meaning, which shows a communicative approach to language learning. Interaction supported by the resource can take the form of asynchronous communication with other people (by e-mail) and contact with language learning materials.

The website can be considered innovative in many respects: pedagogical use of lots of different games, possibility of adding links and contributing content, original tasks and activities (free class website, action mazes and other exercise generation tools, "Never ending story". "Talking crosswords", interactive tree activity to choose the use of articles, etc.), vocabulary builder facility, explanations about learning strategies, exclusive e-mail account.

Technical and pedagogical summary

From a pedagogical standpoint, *John's ESL Community* is an example of a resource which follows sound communicative and constructivist approaches to language learning and teaching. It integrates the interaction possibilities provided by JavaScript programming within a coherent pedagogical framework, using relevant organizing criteria, such as language skills and varying activity types. It is an innovative, interactive and motivating learning tool which allows the student to construct their own learning paths quite easily in a non-linear way. On the debit side, the grouping of the exercises and the overall structure of the site is at times confusing, partly due to the fact that there does not seem to be a default route (or learning path) and a full site map is missing.

Technologically speaking, *John's ESL Community* is very efficient, well designed and optimised for ease of use. It is generally very user-friendly. Audio files, as well as supporting software and plug-ins are easily and quickly accessible, and work. So does the Java-programmed interface. It is a robust tool that successfully integrates content submitted by users (links, messages) and organises external links in a very coherent way. Nevertheless, sometimes there are different links for the same exercise, faulty links (eg. Adjectives quiz), different font sizes together, and spelling mistakes. Screen readability is occasionally poor. But, all in all, the site follows a consistent modern design, is easy to use and responds in an efficient way.

Review by Rafael Seiz Ortiz
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Publications by EUROCALL members: review

Enseñar español en la era del Internet



Cruz Piñol, M. (2002) *Enseñar español en la era del Internet* (Teaching Spanish in the era of the Internet), Barcelona. Ediciones Octaedro, S.L, 174 page book, ISBN 84-8063-556-8, C11.80. Further information: http://www.octaedro.com/prod_show.asp?art_no=10041.

Teaching Spanish in the era of the Internet is the reduced and revised version of the doctoral thesis of University of Barcelona academic, Mar Cruz Piñol. Cruz Piñol has built a respected reputation over several years, as an advocate for the application and adoption of new technologies in Spanish Foreign Language Teaching (SFLT) through active research and publication. This new book defines the current situation in the use of the Internet as a teaching aid in general, and more specifically, in the acquisition of Spanish as a Foreign Language. It presents a new methodology for describing websites that are appropriate for SFLT, and draws conclusions from 207 Spanish Foreign Language websites described using this methodology.

The volume is well documented and for the first time provides Spanish readers with detailed information related to CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) and a method to help Spanish language teachers to find in the web resources for a variety of teaching and learning situations. One of the innovative aspects of this volume is the presentation of content in two complementary formats: the printed book itself, and a supplementary website, accessible from the editor's home page, containing references, an exhaustive bibliography, and a database of the websites analysed in the book. The book is divided into two parts with three and two chapters respectively, followed by a conclusion, a glossary and finally brief instructions for using the Internet resources that are an extension of the book. The overall structure progresses from a theoretical view to the ordered analysis of Web-based STFL resources.

The first section, "New learning methods, new teaching methods", reads easily and situates the use of the Internet for language teaching in a broader pedagogical and historical context. The author emphasises throughout the entire first section that theoretical knowledge of the formal characteristics of electronic discourse and the peculiarities of computer-mediated communication (CMC) will facilitate the work of teachers wishing to use Internet resources as a teaching aid. This is justified and supported by an extensive review of existing literature focused on the innovations that the Internet brings to teaching in general and SFLT in particular.

The three chapters that comprise the first section address the three pillars of the World Wide Web: hypertext, hypermedia and personal communication. The first compares the efficiency of linear text and hypertext for teaching, the second discusses the use of hypermedia in learning -over a surprisingly long period of time- and the third discusses the characteristics of synchronous and asynchronous forms of electronic discourse. Each chapter is structured according to a similar framework: defining the general characteristics of each resource; reviewing theoretical studies supporting its use in pedagogy; and more specifically, concluding with a review of practical experiences of the application of the resource within the teaching and learning of a foreign language. It might have been useful in the revision of practical experiences to discuss on-line courses or CD-ROM projects such as the CAMILLE Project (Computer Assisted Multimedia Interactive Language Learning Environment), which uses hypertext and hypermedia, but it is clear that the author has deliberately

limited her study to free on-line materials since they are more accessible to Spanish foreign language teachers. Especially interesting is the author's emphasis on the dearth of published evidence concerning research written in Spanish that studies the application of Internet resources in general, and the use of asynchronous communication for SFLT in particular. However, she does document some innovative and pioneering projects and experiments conducted prior to 1999. Without the examination of projects after this date, it is difficult for the reader to know whether this is indicative of a systematic problem concerning the use of the Internet by SFL teachers, or if the cause lies elsewhere.

The central and more original contribution of the volume is contained within the second section, "Internet materials for SFLT". In this section, the author describes a methodology to describe web pages that are appropriate for SFLT, and the database that resulted from applying these descriptive criteria to a corpus of 207 websites collected up to the year 2000. The author makes it clear that she does not intend to evaluate the websites, but instead, assign values for every criterion to each site. This methodology -applying values to websites to make them comprehensible to SFL practitioners according to their needs- is the primary contribution of Cruz' work.

Chapter 4 describes the 120 questions or value descriptors used in her methodology, which are grouped by field. Some fields focus on the identity of the pages, such as the address, language of navigation, features of recipient, variety of Spanish used in the page and cultural aspects introduced. Other fields focus on relevant aspects of the online materials, such as the possibility of interaction, use of hypertext, user-friendliness, use of multimedia components, and the existence or not of an assessment system. Finally there is a group of questions to describe the language content, such as the type of exercises, index of resources, specification of the level of the exercise, type of skills practiced, and the level of linguistic analysis. To enable tutors and students to apply these criteria the author has developed a database where they can access a list of materials that are available on the Internet, according to their needs.

Chapter 5 offers an analysis of this database. Amongst the results, it is not surprising that half of the web pages are based in the United States or that the language of navigation is mostly English. Cruz Piñol identifies a preponderance of resources for developing listening and reading comprehension and a corresponding lack of resources for phonetic skills, and suggests -quite correctly in our view- that this reflects modern teaching trends. Another interesting result is the lack of identification of the teaching methodology used in each site, perhaps resulting from the fact that many teachers today use a combination of methods. Websites that assist in the development of writing skills are practically non-existent, claims the author, and there is an absence of sites making use of tools such as syntactic analysers and electronic reference materials applicable to automatic correction of texts. This is surprising since these tasks, which are well suited to automation, were anticipated by early CALL researchers as ideal learning tools. However, the finding is corroborated by recent studies that indicate that up to the year 2002, there has been a significant decrease in the development of pedagogically-driven online materials.

It is difficult to determine from the study how representative of the norm for SFLT are the collection of 207 sites included in the database. We are not told why these particular sites were chosen for the study, except that they are the result of seven years of scouring the Internet. It is worth noting that the database does not include materials that may make use of Internet technologies but are available via other means; however, this does not limit the usefulness of the database for teachers. More important is being aware that the Internet changes rapidly and therefore the database and the results will have to be regularly updated.

The inclusion of an online component of the book is an innovative idea and an entirely appropriate application of some of the principles the author discusses. Included in the publisher's website (<http://www.octaedro.com/espanoleninternet/>) one can find a bibliography that is organised by author and theme, citations quoted in the footnotes, and the URLs of the web pages mentioned in the book. Furthermore, the site will soon provide access to the database of websites described above. The bibliography provides an excellent and comprehensive resource for Spanish researchers interested in the integration of Internet technologies into the language learning and teaching environment.

This volume brings together -for the first time for a Spanish audience- a comprehensive survey of research into the application of Internet technologies to teaching, a methodology to describe web pages applicable to SFLT, and a database that serves as a guide to find practical resources for teachers of Spanish. The volume is easy to read, comprises an essential addition to the library of any forward-looking Spanish language educationalist, and is a useful source of information for teachers wishing to adapt their courses to respond to changing student needs. In particular the website database is a very useful aid to SFL teachers facilitating the location of appropriate materials to be incorporated into a course, and helping teachers and tutors to understand when and why the use of these websites are useful.

Review Carmen Cabot
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Last updated January 1, 2014

