Language Learning and Teaching: Future Routes

Conference Proceedings

Marina Orsini-Jones and Laura Pibworth (Eds.)
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Introduction

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The aims of this publication are to collate and disseminate the papers and reports presented at a conference organised jointly by the JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee)-List-supported Languages Virtual Learning Environments’ User Group and the Routes into Languages West Midlands Consortium. The conference, which brought together languages practitioners from a variety of sectors (HE, FE and Schools) and from all over the UK, was held at Coventry University on 16th March 2011. Its main objectives were to promote collaboration amongst language teachers from different institutions, to disseminate good e-language learning and teaching practice across different educational sectors and to celebrate the success of the Routes into Languages West Midlands Consortium in promoting language learning in schools.

Thanks to a generous contribution from the Routes into Languages West Midlands Consortium, it was also possible to secure the plenary and the workshop by an expert on e-learning and multilingual digital literacies: Gavin Dudeney, who came from Barcelona to give the inspirational talk ‘Beyond the Book’ and to also run a workshop on multilingual digital tools that can be used for language learning (see report by Laura Pibworth below).

The conference offered participants the opportunity to take part in a round table attended by Nick Jones, Education Improvement Adviser, Coventry City Council; Tiziana Cervi-Wilson, Tracey Holker and Janet Lewis - Routes into Languages, West Midlands Consortium, Coventry University; Kat Stevenson, Routes into Languages West Midlands Consortium - Project Manager, Aston University and Gavin Dudeney, e-learning consultant. Ideas were shared on how to enhance the future of languages both in the region in particular and in the UK in general.

In their paper Tiziana Cervi-Wilson and Janet Lewis present a comprehensive summary of the Routes into Languages outreach activities that they organised at Coventry University, focusing in particular on the role of the Student Ambassador. They discuss how the initiatives that they have implemented also promote the employment prospects of the languages students involved.
Elena Polisca’s contribution illustrates an interesting ‘double model’ of mentoring, both face-to-face and online, implemented by the Italian Department at the University of Manchester and evaluates the merits of this initiative. Motivated final-year students are recruited to act as mentors for a small number of sixth-formers each and the scheme is promoting a good exchange of ideas and skills from the ‘expert students’ at university to the pupils in a sixth-form college in Huddersfield.

Elwyn Lloyd’s paper proposes a stimulating analysis of how learners’ personality types affect their willingness to communicate through a language learning Social Networking Site like Livemocha. Participants were asked to complete an adaptation of a shortened, online version of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) personality ‘test’. This was used to enable the examination of any possible link between the participants’ personality types and their willingness to communicate in L2 with Livemocha language partners.

Billy Brick and Erika Corradini report on the HumBox initiative. The Humbox is an online space for the publication, sharing and managing of digital humanities resources, a useful repository where language teachers can share and disseminate content that can be used in many educational settings.

To sum up, many of the publications in this collection stress the need to equip students and staff with multilingual digital multiliteracies. Carefully structured activities that allow students to be creative and to personalise the e-learning environment can help them both to cope with the various hypertextual dimensions they face in every-day life and to enhance their academic multilingual multiliteracy and genre awareness. This in turn will also enhance their graduate career prospects.

However, as MentorE and the Routes into Languages activities demonstrate, face-to-face contact is also fundamental for the purpose of building confidence in a foreign language, and the MentorE evaluation is particularly poignant in this respect, as pupils and students alike preferred to have face-to-face contact rather than virtual exchanges. So digital literacies are important, but we should not lose sight of the human need for ‘real’ contact too, particularly when dealing with language learning, as language is very close to the ‘essence’ of ‘being human’.

We hope that this publication can give its readers food for thought and interesting and/or innovative ideas on how to promote effective language learning and teaching in HE, FE and Schools.

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May 2012
The Routes into Languages West Midlands Consortium: School/University Collaboration to Enhance Students’ Employment Prospects at Coventry University

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Keywords: employability, Routes into Languages, HEFCE, student ambassadors, schools, Coventry

Introduction to the project

Routes into Languages, launched in September 2006, was an £8 million group of projects funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), initially for three years. The projects’ purpose was to tackle the decline in language learning in English schools, following the government’s decision in 2002 to make languages optional after the age of 14, and the concomitant downturn in the numbers of students entering Higher Education (HE) to study for degrees in modern languages (see also Footitt 2005 and UCU 2006). The closure of many language courses and sometimes of whole departments followed. The evidence emerging from government reviews and reports from industry showed that whilst the study of languages in schools and in HE may be in sharp decline, the skills gained on languages courses make young people successful in the global marketplace (The Nuffield Foundation 2000, Worton 2008). In 2005 the government identified the decline in ‘strategically important and vulnerable subjects’ (SIVS), including modern foreign languages, as a matter of concern, which HEFCE began to support (see HEFCE 2011a). The Routes into Languages project was introduced in response to these concerns.

Three national bodies combined in the original initiative: the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies (LLAS), the University Council of Modern Languages (UCML) and CILT (Centre for Information in Language Teaching - the National Centre for Languages). The projects were to be managed, supported and evaluated nationally by a team based at the University of Southampton, led by Professor Mike Kelly.

Funding was to be disseminated through the clusters of HE institutions who were invited to form regional consortia (or networks) and to draw up detailed proposals for a three-year programme of regional collaborative activities promoting languages activities in their regional schools and colleges.
At the same time, two national networks were established: a translation network led by Salford University and an interpreting network led by Leeds University, tasked with increasing the number of first-language English students taking translating and/or interpreting courses in HE and with broadening the range of languages offered on such courses.

Subsequently, an extension to funding was announced in January 2010: £487,000 from HEFCE and Business Information and Skills (BiS), followed by an interim award of £250,000 in January 2010. In July 2011 HEFCE granted a further £1.19 million that will allow the project to run until July 2012. The various funding extensions beyond the initial three years, whilst welcome, have led to some feeling of uncertainty and difficulties in planning.

The West Midlands Regional Consortium for Routes into Languages was one of the four consortia to be funded in the first round of bids. It brought together six universities: Aston (lead partner), Birmingham, Coventry, Keele, Warwick and Wolverhampton. In drawing up the West Midlands regional bid, the six universities collaborated with Networks for Excellence and with Comenius West Midlands, and had support from the Regional Languages Network, the Regional Development Agency – Advantage West Midlands and the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Following confirmation of funding, the West Midlands Regional Consortium set about implementing language-based projects with local schools and colleges for the period 2007 to 2010. Some cross-consortium regional events were also designed and a regional administrator was appointed and based at Aston University. Funding to each partner institution was monitored and annually reviewed by Aston. A regional launch was held at Birmingham International Airport on 30 November 2007. This was followed by a national launch, organised by the LLAS at the University of Southampton and held at City Hall London on 5 February 2008.

The guidelines set out in the call for bids encouraged consortia to consider HEFCE’s strategic priorities for widening participating and fair access to HE, in order to encourage the take up of language learning in schools and colleges among social groups who have traditionally been under-represented (HEFCE 2007).

Routes into Languages consortia were encouraged to innovate and to experiment so that, following evaluation, best practice could be shared and disseminated. In the West Midlands, the six participating HE institutions designed project plans that played to the individual strengths of each partner institution. For example, Keele University focused on its widening participation agenda; Birmingham University held several sports events in co-operation with the Youth Sport Trust (2012).
Coventry University already had a well-established record of schools liaison work that had been developed over many years. *Routes into Languages* funding provided an important boost to such activities. Liaison work with schools and colleges could now be expanded in a variety of ways. Across the region, links with longstanding partners were strengthened; new partnerships were developed. *Routes into Languages* funding sent out a welcome and very powerful message that undoubtedly raised the profile of ‘outreach’ work for languages that had often in the past relied on the goodwill of individual members of staff.

2. The Languages Student Ambassadors at Coventry University

Over the first three years of Coventry University’s *Routes into Languages* activities, it became apparent that the role and importance of the work done by Student Ambassadors was proving to be particularly effective. Requests for Student Ambassadors who could provide a variety of in-school activities and events grew constantly. In response to this demand, Coventry University’s *Routes into Languages* work gave an increasingly prominent role to its Student Ambassadors.

At the same time, Coventry University was fully committed to developing its undergraduates’ employability competencies through a range of initiatives that included early experience of the world of work, allowing them to become ‘enterprising and entrepreneurial, contributing to innovation, creativity and productivity in their organisation or community of practice’ (Atkins 2006).

Employability was also one of the key 2010 tests that had been set by the University, specifically in the commitment to have: ‘rolled out innovative, imaginative and vocationally relevant courses in all areas of the curriculum, and to improve the quality of the wider student experience, so that we have improved the up-take into graduate jobs from 60% to 70%’ (Atkins 2010). The measure adopted for this test was (and is) the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) return figure, which records the proportion of students entering graduate-level jobs.

There thus existed an alignment between the *Routes into Languages* goals and one of Coventry University’s (2006) key missions and targets, as Student Ambassadors were receiving valuable work-placement training and experience and developing competencies enhancing their graduate job destinations.
3. What is Employability?

Relevant literature suggests that employability is not easy to conceptualise or explain, for example De Grip, Van Loo and Sanders (2004: 212) defined it as a ‘fuzzy’ concept. Employability has been described in various ways, ranging from: ‘making closer links between Education and the world of work.’ (Harvey et al. 2002:4) to: ‘having the capability to gain initial employment, maintain employment and obtain new employment if required’ (Hillage and Pollard 1998). The Confederation of British Industry’s definition of employability (CBI 2007:6) is the following: ‘A set of attributes, skills and knowledge that all labour market participants should possess to ensure they have the capability of being effective in the workplace – to the benefit of themselves, their employer and the wider economy’.

Watts (2006:7) makes a distinction between immediate employability and sustainable employability. Immediate employability is seen as students having the attributes to obtain a graduate job, thus the emphasis is on being ‘ready for work’. Sustainable employability is defined by Watts as ‘the ability not only to secure a first job but also to remain employable throughout life’. This definition thus indicates attributes needed by the graduate to manage their career development that will ‘sustain one’s employability’ (Watts 2006:7).

However, employability is by no means a new concern for Higher Education (HE). The need for graduates to make an effective contribution to the labour market was firstly highlighted in the Robbins Report (Committee of Higher Education 1963). Subsequently, the report of the National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education, the Dearing Report (NCIHE 1997) made the importance of education for employability clear and explicit and highlighted the value of key skills development at university. It also recommended increasing the opportunities for work experience and for meaningful reflection on such experience in terms of personal development planning (PDP). The Dearing Report identified key skills, referring to them as ‘employability skills’ and ‘competencies,’ that needed to be developed by students during their HE courses.

The British Government embraced the Dearing Report. The ‘employment of graduate performance indicator’ was introduced in 1999 to measure the performance of individual universities in terms of the employment outcomes of their graduates’ (Smith, McKnight and Naylor 2000). The first job destination is one of the measures that the government uses to allocate funding to HE institutions, which are therefore all striving to provide employment-related skills to their students, to enable them to achieve the best possible employment outcomes.
As the cost involved in obtaining a degree increases, employment prospects on graduation are of interest to a wide range of stakeholders, including the government, prospective students, parents and potential employers.

Harvey (2002:4) also suggested that students should be supported by extra-curricular experiences and they should be given the opportunity to reflect on all of these opportunities taken up to eventually demonstrate these employability skills to employers during the recruitment process. Harvey, Moon and Geall (1997:6) suggest that employers tend to look for ‘a range of personal attributes’ including intelligence, self-confidence and flexibility and ‘interactive attributes’ including ‘interpersonal skills, team working, and communication skills.

Knight and Yorke’s (2006) work for the Enhancing Student Employability Team (ESECT) funded by HEFCE is very influential within Higher Education. ESECT have considered how HEIs can influence the employability of graduates in two series of reports, where employability is defined as: ‘a set of competencies that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupation(s), which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy’ (Knight and Yorke 2006a:8). It is this definition of employability that has been adopted by Coventry University. It suggests that employability can make convincing claims in relation to four areas: Understanding; Skillful practices; Efficacy beliefs; Metacognition (USEM). Whilst USEM is not the only model of employability, it is the most widely used and represents the basis of a range of variants, all of which have at their core the twin elements of knowledge and self.

Figure 1: The USEM Account of Employability (Knight and Yorke 2006b:5)
The USEM principles are defined as follows:

Subject Understanding (U)

- To ensure that students have the opportunity to develop the necessary intellectual skills to succeed in their discipline area.
- To provide an innovative and up-to-date curriculum to produce graduates whose subject knowledge is relevant and current.
- To develop teaching, learning and assessment strategies which encourage complex learning and enhances employability.

Skillful Practices (S)

- To develop subject specific employability skills.
- To provide opportunities to develop non-subject specific employability skills.
- To help and support students in undertaking extra-curricular activities which enhance future employability.

Efficacy Beliefs (Personal Qualities) (E)

- To make students aware of future potential graduate career paths.
- To raise student aspirations in relation to their future career goals.
- To provide a positive and supportive environment for students to explore future career paths.
- To ensure that students have the opportunity to develop the employment search skills necessary to achieve their career goals.

Metacognition (Reflexivity) (M)

- To provide opportunities for students to reflect on their learning and future development.
- To encourage students to recognise their achievements and the contribution these make to their employability.
- To encourage students to showcase their achievements and abilities to potential employers.

(Knight and Yorke 2006b:5-6)

Routes into Languages work undertaken by Student Ambassadors aims to support the USEM categories.
4. The Routes into Languages Project at Coventry University

The Routes into Languages project at Coventry University has been based in the Faculty of Business, Environment and Society, led by academic staff based in the Department of English and Languages.

In 2008-2009 staff designed a programme of innovative activities for young people aged 14-18, aimed at encouraging them to engage with language learning. The activities were designed to take place ‘in house’, in the Languages Centre, providing the young learners with the opportunity to visit the University campus, to meet academic staff and have a taste of HE. Other activities took place in schools or colleges, led by academic staff working with Student Ambassadors.

Languages staff at Coventry University have always worked closely with local schools and colleges when planning outreach work. Consultation with teachers was carried out by a series of meetings that were held at the University at the end of the school day. In 2009, it was decided that the priority should be to find out what teachers wanted by undertaking visits to local school. Following this small-scale ‘road show’ we were able to match what the schools needed and what we could offer more effectively. The clearest message from local schools was that, whether for one-off events such as languages tasters, or Why Study Languages? presentations, or for longer term classroom support, our Student Ambassadors were by far the most frequently requested form of support, therefore the Routes into Languages offer was adapted (see below for details of the Routes into Languages events at Coventry University).

Coventry University has favoured the use of Student Ambassadors because:

- Pupils identify with young speakers.
- Teachers welcome the range of languages and of international experience that Student Ambassadors can introduce, for example, less widely taught languages such as Catalan, Swahili, Wolof or an enthusiastic presentation about ‘My Year Abroad in Peru’.
- Native speaker Student Ambassadors bring authenticity and enthusiasm to the classroom. They are always keen to share their mother tongue and to tell young learners about their national or regional culture. For example a student from Spain was ‘surprised’ to be asked to give a taster class on Basque language and culture.
- Student Ambassadors who are studying for degrees in Languages are key communicators about the positive experience of studying languages in HE. They can tell pupils about their personal experiences of language learning, including the Year Abroad. They are particularly good at explaining how they overcame their
initial trepidation at the prospect of the Year Abroad, particularly if the Student Ambassadors’ prior experience of overseas travel was limited. Furthermore, if the Student Ambassador is a former pupil of the particular school or college, their role-modelling can be truly inspiring.

At Coventry University, the training of Student Ambassadors is given a prominent role. Ambassadors engage in microteaching sessions and presentation skills sessions and receive constructive feedback from more experienced staff. Student Ambassadors are also encouraged to work together, to learn from each and to share good practice. At the event itself, even if students are presenting individually, it is expected that they attend and observe at least one other session and give peer feedback (as well as acting as a supportive presence in the classroom). Such tandem work also provides excellent opportunities for students who are native speakers to work closely with non-native speakers.

In addition to feedback from their peers, Student Ambassadors receive the feedback that we always request from the teachers who were present at a Routes into Languages event. Student Ambassadors thereby have the experience of being trained by University staff and of working with teachers in schools and colleges. These strategies are especially useful for students who are contemplating language teaching as a career. Even if they do not choose teaching as a career, this is a valuable work-experience opportunity that enhances their Curriculum Vitae. Many Student Ambassadors have become enthusiastic members of the Routes into Languages team, with some participating in events during all three UK-based years of their degree course.

At the same time, it is undeniable that Student Ambassadors need very careful selection. They need good training, briefing and mentoring. Matching their availability with the schools and colleges’ timetables, and organising travel where distances are great, can be very time-consuming. Student Ambassadors are a ‘fluid’ population and a constant supply is needed as they graduate, return to their home countries or go on their Year Abroad. In the academic year 2010-2011 the reduction in Routes funding led to a reduction in the time that administrative and academic staff can devote to supporting the project. A new development in 2010 has however helped with finding more ambassadors: the launch of the MA in English Language Teaching that offers the Routes team the opportunity to select trained teachers from a variety of multilingual and multicultural backgrounds, and enabled the team to offer sessions in lesser known languages, such as Ashanti.
4.1 List of activities/events organised by the Routes into Languages team at Coventry University

*Speak a Language in a Day*

A full day of language and culture for pupils in Years 9-11. These days have been offered in 12 different languages over the 5 years of the Routes project. A highly successful version has involved a ‘Product Design Day’, combining language learning with learning about doing business in the target market. The target language can be one that pupils are already studying or one that is completely new to them. The day is led by academic staff, with support from Student Ambassadors.

*GCSE Revision Day*

A full day tailored to meet the specific needs of pupils in the period before public exams. The day is led by academic staff, with support from Student Ambassadors. Over the 6 years of the project there have been had many more requests to carry out activities in schools. ‘Speak a Language in a Day’ and ‘GCSE Revision Days’ have, in the end, been more frequently delivered in schools than on the University campus.

*Language Tasters*

A short but exciting introduction to one – or more - new languages. These sessions are led by Student Ambassadors who are native speakers of the target language. We have offered Arabic, Basque, Catalan, Mandarin Chinese, Finnish, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Romanian, Russian, Swahili, Tamil, Turkish, Wolof and Xhosa. Tasters are usually delivered in short 30-40 minute ‘bursts of activity’ that keep pupils constantly interested and motivated.

*Why Study Languages?*

Student Ambassadors who are studying Languages degrees give a short presentation and/or lead a question-and-answer session about their experience of studying Languages and about the all-important Year Abroad. Materials for these presentations were created in a collaboration between the Routes Consortia and the Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies’ (LLAS). A useful addition has been the involvement of undergraduate students studying a language on a University-Wide Language Programme who can promote the notion that Languages in HE is ‘for all’ and is not restricted to ‘specialists’. These presentations can be built into short assemblies, or parents’ evenings, as well as language classes. The underlying message of ‘Why Study Languages?’ needs to be broadcast to all pupils, even to those who may drop languages before A-level and do not intend to do a languages
degree. Whilst Routes into Languages are very keen to promote language degrees, pupils need to be made aware that they resume language learning or begin a new language in HE.¹

**Talk to a Languages Graduate**

Languages graduates give a short talk and answer questions about their Languages degree and their career paths to date. Some of these graduates are former pupils from local schools. Many former Students Ambassadors have gone on to train as language teachers and are teaching in local schools.

**Conclusion**

Both all staff involved and student ambassadors view the experience of working in close collaboration with local schools as very rewarding. Student Ambassadors who went on to apply for graduate jobs reported to the Routes team that the experience had been invaluable for the purpose of enhancing their job-related competencies, their Curriculum Vitae and their confidence levels. It is generally recognised (as reported by John Coleman at the 2012 UCML Annual General Meeting at LSE) that the Routes into Languages initiative is one of the few that has truly worked in terms of raising the profile of languages, encouraging pupils in schools to consider studying languages at university and enhancing the employment prospects of the HE students involved. It is hoped that the government will keep funding this initiative for languages, which are part of the strategically important and vulnerable subjects.

We would like to conclude with some of the Student Ambassadors’ comments on this initiative:

‘I thought it was a really good opportunity to talk to the children about languages and try and change their opinions a bit. I really enjoyed telling them about the year abroad and the opportunities they can have if they have a second language’. (June 2007)

‘I really enjoyed going and talking to the kids about languages. I wish I had been given this kind of opportunity when I was at school, because I only really found out about careers with languages when I came to University’. (March 2008)

‘I found the experience of delivering my career talk very enjoyable. The students were very responsive’. (February 2010)

¹ All Coventry University undergraduates have the opportunity to study a 10-credit foreign language module in each year of their degree programme. Languages modules form part of a portfolio of career-enhancing ‘Add+vantage’ modules that enjoy ‘ring-fenced’ timetable slots. Add+vantage language modules are very popular.
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MentorE: mentoring support to facilitate language learning

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Keywords: mentoring, peer-assisted learning, secondary education, Italian, university students, virtual, Wimba, Blackboard, Manchester

Introduction

In 2008, the Routes into Languages report on community languages in Higher Education (HE hereafter) highlighted that

if it is […] desirable […] to enable as many people as possible to achieve high levels of competence in all the languages to which they have access, there is a pressing need to review formal opportunities to study community languages in all educational sectors and to identify ways in which these could be developed to meet the needs and realise the potential of the UK’s increasingly multilingual population (Routes into Languages 2008:14).

The report also highlighted that formal course provision for community language speakers is not adequate and that more needs to be done to address this issue at all levels of education.

Italian in the UK is studied both as a foreign language and as a community language. However, it is mostly studied as a foreign language. In the experience of the department of Italian Studies at University of Manchester, it is particularly challenging to recruit a high number of students with either an A-level qualification or with a ‘community language’ background.

The MentorE project started in 2009 with the aim of addressing the above-mentioned issue. MentorE offers a new learning platform for students of Italian whilst continuing to motivate learners beyond their strictest curricular needs. The project is a partnership between Italian Studies at the university and Greenhead College, a Sixth-form college in Huddersfield, whereby students of the university mentor pupils at Greenhead through one academic year over a series of ‘lingua-cultural’ sessions. The project offers opportunities to further the acquisition and understanding of Italian language and culture for both ‘conventional’ and community learners.
2. The MentorE project: rationale and aims

The rationale behind the project is simple and highly replicable for all other community/foreign languages across the UK. Highly motivated final-year students of the university are recruited to act as mentors for a small number of sixth-formers each (typically 5). The student mentors are instructed to give sessions in the target language on a variety of topics in which mentors are strongly interested. Typically, these have included subjects like Italian cinema, music, food, stereotypes and current affairs. The project is divided over two semesters of one academic year. In the first semester, students and pupils meet for three face-to-face sessions at the college, whereas in the second semester sessions are of a virtual nature and carried out on Blackboard (the University’s Virtual Learning Environment, hereafter VLE) through the Wimba Classroom e-conferencing facility (Wimba 2009). After the first pilot year, one extra session was added at the end of the face-to-face phase: pupils were invited to attend a taster day at the university as students of Italian Studies. They had the opportunity to attend mini-lectures and mini language classes, talk to staff, visit the Language Centre and other relevant sites of the campus with their mentors.

As well as motivating pupils to continue studying Italian (potentially through to HE), the project wishes to engage learners through a different learning platform by offering a different perspective beyond the more formal learning routes. Through MentorE, both students and pupils broaden their cultural knowledge and linguistic skills, become reciprocally enthused and strengthen links with a ‘new’ community, capitalising on each other’s skills.

3. Why the mentoring route?

Mentoring is intended as one area of activity within Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL). PAL involves one person supporting one other (or others) with aspects of their learning in order to enhance it. Crucially, those taking part in PAL or mentoring do so within a peer group. Falchikov (2001) identified four categories within this remit. In particular, MentorE features ‘cross-level peer tutoring involving two institutions’ (Falchikov 2011:9), and, in line with the PAL benefits highlighted by Donaldson and Topping (1996:7), it aims to promote ‘intellectual interaction, deeper understanding, greater openness, transferable skills, social interaction, enjoyment’.

Research has shown clear benefits of PAL for all those involved (Capstick and Fleming 2004; Capstick, Fleming and Hurne 2004, Packham and Miller 2000). In particular, it provides participants with the opportunity to take ownership of the learning process, aids the development of transferable skills (Price and Rust 1995), critical thinking (Koehler 1995), as well as enhancing social learning (Ashwin 2003) and personal development skills (Donelan 1999).
In MentorE, however, students do not simply act as peer tutors but also provide more general, all-round support for those interested in pursuing the learning of Italian through to university. In this respect, the MentorE mentors straddle both the PAL and peer mentoring routes whilst acting as facilitators in several ways. Mentors support the learning of the Italian language and offer advice on a number of issues of importance to pupils, such as: the transition between SE and HE, any queries relating to HE and questions on the ‘Year Abroad’ experience to name only a few.

Crucially, university students act as role models for the younger pupils, who, in turn, identify with mentors and their career progression on the languages ladder. Pupils show appreciation for the language skills demonstrated by mentors and experience first-hand the level of proficiency that can be achieved in Italian at HE level. In this respect, MentorE represents a successful example of co-operative learning with participants ‘working together to accomplish shared goals [...] see[ing] outcomes as beneficial to themselves and to all the other members of the group’ (Donelan and Wallace 1998:12). The learning of a language has the potential to foster, in the broadest PAL sense, ‘positive interdependence’ (Donelan and Wallace 1998), whereby participants actively engage with one another through a variety of tasks and exercises meant to achieve specific learning objectives.

4. The face-to-face MentorE sessions: setting up and delivery

At the beginning of the academic year, vacancies for mentors are advertised to students at final-year level at university. Typically, MentorE aims to recruit committed, enthusiastic and reliable students with an advanced level of proficiency in the Italian language (approximately C1 Common European Framework of Reference - CEFR). Mentors undergo a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check and agree to work for the University for a set fee for the project. The fee covers tutoring time at the college, time spent devising sessions, time spent training for the experience and any additional time spent training in conjunction with an academic member of staff for each individual student. Travelling expenses are also reimbursed. Mentors are then allocated a small number of pupils each, at AS or A2 level and a mutually convenient time for sessions is agreed with the college. Depending on numbers, mentors may work in pairs or alone.

Training sessions for mentors focus on key principles of teaching, reflections on their mentoring role, help in devising sessions and any ad-hoc support that may be needed. It is worth noting that, since the start of the project, the majority of mentors had spent time in Italy working as teaching assistants for the British Council during their ‘Year Abroad’ and/or had previously acted as peer mentors for Italian Studies for a separate project.
The aims of the sessions at The Greenhead College in Huddersfield are twofold. Sessions for the lower-sixth groups focus on helping pupils become more familiar with the Italian language through a series of tasks that support vocabulary acquisition and reinforce key grammar concepts. For the upper-sixth groups, sessions aim to increase oral fluency and confidence in the spoken language in the pupils. All sessions are conducted in the target language and have a strong cultural focus: mentors are encouraged to choose topics that reflect their personal interests in the target culture, such as Italian music or films. Mentors are also encouraged to establish a dialogic approach with pupils with respect to the topics the latter may be interested in and do not necessarily get the opportunity to explore within the constraints of formal curricular learning. In this respect, the student-centred approach of MentorE echoes Knowles’s (1972) suggestions that learners maximise their learning when the process focuses on what learners want to learn as opposed to what teachers want to teach. It has been interesting to note that both students and pupils share common interests insofar as contemporary music, films, and food are concerned.

The first face-to-face session was structured in a similar way both year groups. It outlined the project, offered information about studying languages at university, introduced pupils to the Year Abroad experience, and encouraged conversation in Italian. Interestingly, one of the mentors felt that one of the aims of the first session is ‘to encourage the [pupils] to relax and enjoy speaking in Italian’.

5. The virtual sessions: setting up, delivery and challenges

The second part of the project was carried out remotely through Wimba Classroom (Wimba 2009), the e-conferencing facility within the University’s VLE. Both students and pupils received additional training for Wimba, and completed three additional sessions in semester 2. Whilst the aims of the project remained unchanged, the virtual sessions have proved to be more challenging than the face-to-face ones in several ways. Firstly, additional training slots had to be found: this proved more problematic than envisaged given the already strict constraints of different college and university timetables. Additionally, guest IDs had to be created for pupils to grant them access to the VLE, and time allocated for pupils to familiarise themselves with both the VLE and Wimba Classroom (Wimba 2009).

For this phase of the project, exercises were designed so that participants would make the most of the new delivery medium: interactive activities were selected so that pupils and students would actively engage and interact to minimise extended moments of silence given the lack of face-to-face interaction. In particular, short
interactive questionnaires were created after certain language activities to reinforce understanding or promote vocabulary acquisition (Figure 1), or the whiteboard facilities were used to support and enhance collaboration from both parties on a given exercise (Figure 2).

Figure 1: An example of an interactive activity

Figure 2: Shared whiteboard activities

One important drawback of this stage of MentorE was that the college did not have enough webcams to support the interactions; even with a smaller number of webcams, however, the bandwidth was stretched and activities were slowed down considerably. Thus, webcams were only used in some sessions for ‘hellos’ and ‘goodbyes’; other sessions were completed using only headsets with built-in microphones. In this respect, the potential to enhance listening and speaking skills is considerable. However, one issue with Wimba Classroom (Wimba 2009) that has prevented, to an extent, the successful delivery of virtual sessions so far, is that pupils with guest IDs did not appear within the conversation or chat with their respective
names and featured, for example, as ‘guest01’. Mentors have been finding speaking with ‘guests’ challenging as they have been unable to recognise pupils from voices alone. Pupils, in turn, were observed to be getting distracted more easily from tasks given the lack of personal (and face-to-face) engagement that arose from the situation.

6. Feedback from pilot project 1 and limitations of study

The first pilot project in 2009-2010 only consisted of face-to-face sessions: the virtual encounters had to be cancelled at very short notice for reasons beyond the organisers’ control. Pupils were administered an evaluation questionnaire on MentorE which consisted of simple yes / no questions, questions built on a 4-point Likert scale and questions inviting open comments. Overall, the feedback was positive despite the fact that the pilot phase was shorter than envisaged. Due to internal constraints at both institutions, such as different holiday periods, questionnaires were administered four months after the end of the project; it is therefore legitimate to assume that results may have been different had the questionnaires been distributed immediately after the project had ended. Moreover, not all pupils completed the questionnaires, and not all pupils answered all questions.

Overall, pupils seemed satisfied with the quality of the first introductory face-to-face session, and some of them thought that their knowledge of the Italian language and culture had improved (Figure 3):

Q.2: Rate introductory session
Q.8: Do you think your Italian improved?
Q.9: Do you think your knowledge of Italian culture improved?

![Figure 3: Students’ perceptions of their language learning](image)
Some pupils claimed that, had there been the possibility, they would have liked to continue with the virtual sessions; all respondents enjoyed taking part in the project and the majority would recommend it to other pupils (Figure 4):

Q.10: Would you have liked to have continued with the virtual mentoring with your mentor?

Q.11: Did you enjoy taking part in MentorE?

Q.12: Would you recommend MentorE to other pupils?

![Figure 4: Student enjoyment of MentorE and recommendations](image)

Feedback from university students was obtained through individual interviews. As the comments below show, the mentoring experience was a very rewarding one for them, thus substantiating the claims summarised by Capstick (2004:3) that amongst other things, taking part in mentoring sessions helps mentors develop communication skills and 'a more social view of learning':

- *I liked having a role, chatting about the skills you have.*
- *The pupils were motivated and seemed into it.*
- *I was nervous but I got self-confidence.*
- *Really good to use what I have been studying [at university] in a social and informative scenario interacting with other people.*
- *It was good fun!*
- *I liked introducing [the pupils] to something they like (Italian music).*
Overall, and taking into account unforeseen circumstances that cut the year one pilot short, it was felt by the organisers that MentorE was a worthwhile project that could be continued the following year with integrated virtual sessions. In particular, in Capstick’s (2004:3) words, the outcomes achieved by the mentors, as outlined previously, ‘are also important indicators of the worth of the scheme, particularly as these students are generally committed and enthusiastic individuals essential to the success of the [scheme] itself’.

7. Interim feedback from pilot project 2

Although at the time of writing the MentorE sessions are not fully completed and formal feedback will be collected between March and April 2011, informal feedback has been received from all parties. Overall, both students and pupils seem very satisfied with the face-to-face side of the project. Pupils have been enjoying getting to know their mentors, practising Italian in an informal environment and coming to university to sample life in HE. As far as the virtual sessions are concerned, some of the most pressing issues have been presented above. Staff at both institutions have been liaising closely with IT support to address each issue as it emerged. Anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that the virtual sessions have been less successful than the face-to-face ones. The various electronic and software glitches seem to have an effect on motivation for all participants, and mentors in particular have been expressing some apprehension as each virtual session approaches. At the college, pupils have been reported to engage more fully with the face-to-face interactions despite initial excitement at the novelty of the teaching medium in the second phase of MentorE: the face-to-face engagement seems to be more meaningful for both students and pupils alike. This seems to corroborate Ehrman and Dörnyei’s (1998) view on interpersonal and group dynamics in language learning:

*in these much development of communicative skills happens through participation in meaningful, “lifelike” communicative tasks. The quality and quantity of the interaction necessary for effective task involvement, however, are largely a function of the relationship between the participants and the resulting psychological climate* (Ehrman and Dörnyei 1998:2).

It seems that the difficulty in maintaining personal contact in the virtual sessions altered the relationship between students and pupils to the extent that both the success of the activities and the enjoyment of the project were reduced.
Conclusion and future developments

Despite the fact that a formal evaluation of the second pilot project is still to take place, organisers feel that overall MentorE has continued to meet its objectives. By taking part in MentorE, pupils are motivated to pursue the study of Italian language and culture beyond their strictest curricular needs; both pupils and students have been engaging with the Italian language interacting for the most part in Italian; all participants seem to have increased their cultural knowledge; pupils have been offered a different, more social perspective of learning, and engaging with, a language; and perhaps more crucially then most, participants at both institutions have enjoyed the MentorE experience.

For the academic year 2011-2012, it was decided that the project would continue unaltered for the face-to-face sessions. As far as the virtual sessions were concerned, organisers were considering experimenting with a different piece of software to improve meaningful interactions amongst participants. At the time of writing (2011), Skype, the free online face-to-face telephony software (Skype 2011), seemed a suitable alternative. However, should the project continue through Skype, different types of linguistic exercises would have to be developed since Skype, unlike Wimba Classroom (Wimba 2009), does not offer the opportunity to share Powerpoint presentations live within the same screen window. Benefits of using Skype for peer-to-peer lingua-cultural projects have been shown recently (Polisca 2011) and its potential for MentorE cannot be underestimated. In particular, should Skype be adopted, the MentorE activities would have to involve more direct contributions from pupils including, potentially, the setting of homework that may link with aspects of their formal classroom-based learning.

To conclude, this paper aims to illustrate that language learning for both ‘conventional’ and community pupils and students does not always and necessarily have to take place through formal routes. MentorE is a highly transferable project which could be applied to any language in several contexts. Its potential lies in the opportunities it offers participants to engage with collaborative, peer-to-peer learning favouring particularly those individuals interested in pursuing their interest in a foreign or community language and culture beyond their curricular needs.²

² If you are interested in MentorE and would like to know more, please get in touch with elena.polisca@manchester.ac.uk
References


Learners’ Personality Types and ‘Willingness to Communicate’ through Livemocha.com, a Social Networking Site for Language Learning and Practice

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Keywords: Social Networking Site, willingness to communicate, personality types, online language exchange, Livemocha

Introduction

Social Networking Sites (SNSs) with the specific purpose of enabling language learners to engage in language exchange with native speakers of their target languages began appearing online around 2007, presenting convenient opportunities for authentic and meaningful communication in L2. In view of the fact that the communication can be asynchronous or synchronous, spoken or written, these websites may suit learners of different personality types, and increased ‘willingness to communicate’ (MacIntyre et al. 1998) may be observed in some learners, in comparison with how willingly they might communicate in the traditional classroom environment.

In a languages SNS, users create a profile for themselves, as they would in one of the mainstream, generic social networking sites such as Facebook, and they indicate which language(s) they speak and which they would like to learn or practise. They are then matched up with native speakers of those target languages, and can interact with their new ‘language partners’ or ‘friends’ both synchronously and asynchronously, using speech and writing. The communication can be very rewarding and beneficial if a rapport is struck up with a responsive and amenable language partner. It is quite easy to find such partners through the feedback that members of these online language learning communities are encouraged to give each other on their responses to the language exercises (mainly drill and practice) presented in the website. If a learner posts a response to an exercise, and then notices afterwards that other members have added useful comments, corrections and feedback to it, then he or she can send a friendship request to some or all of those members who have supplied the feedback. The new language partners can then continue to communicate asynchronously by posting feedback on each other’s responses to tasks in the website, and also via email within the website. They may also choose to communicate synchronously, using a text-based chat application, and they may later decide to open the audio and video channels, if they connect microphones or webcams.
The languages SNSs then offer the possibility for learners to practise the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, and there is considerable potential for learning about the L2 culture(s) through direct contact with native-speaker members of L2-speaking communities. Although interactions in these websites are not without certain drawbacks, it seems possible that genuine friendships may be established between people who have come into contact through a languages SNS, which is why they may be seen as constituting an additional ‘reason’ or at least ‘motive’ for learning a language; learners may be keen to maintain and develop these new online friendships.

A study was carried out at Coventry University in order to gather information with regard to the use a group of learners would make of a languages SNS during a given period, and to analyse this whilst taking into account the variables of learner personality, described using MBTI personality type indicators. Data was gathered through questionnaires and through face-to-face focus-group sessions, and the participants in the study were also asked to complete log sheets recording details of the activities they engaged in each time they logged on to the website ‘Livemocha.com’. This languages SNS was chosen for the study as it was the first of its kind to be launched, in September 2007, and has the largest user group: 8.5 million members at the time of writing (Livemocha 2011).

2. SNSs in Language Learning and Teaching

Social Networking Sites are widely seen as being among the most significant of the so-called social software applications that have begun to proliferate since 2005 (Boyd 2007, Godwin-Jones 2008, Harrison and Thomas 2009, McBride 2009, McLoughlin and Lee 2007, Stevenson and Liu 2010, Sykes et al. 2008), and which have played a fundamental role in the evolution of the World Wide Web into its current ‘version’ – Web 2.0 (O’Reilly 2005: n.p.), as it has come to be known.

Proponents of the use of Web 2.0 tools in language teaching and learning naturally point to the wealth of opportunities that social software applications – particularly social networking sites – provide for learners to engage in authentic communication in meaningful contexts (Godwin-Jones 2008, Harrison and Thomas 2009, McBride 2009, Stevenson and Liu 2010, Sykes et al. 2008).
3. Pedagogies for the Digital Age

Prensky (2001) has argued that there need to be major changes in pedagogical approaches in order to accommodate the needs and expectations of today’s students (language learners included), and this is echoed by McLoughlin and Lee (2007), Fischer and Konomi (2005) and Owen et al. (2006) in the points they make regarding the impacts on education of the diffusion of ICTs, with particular reference to the social software applications of Web 2.0. McLoughlin and Lee (2007:664) assert there is “increasing demand for new educational approaches and pedagogies”, and overall it would seem that many see in social software applications opportunities for implementing pedagogies that could ultimately signify a move away from the linear, instructivist approaches to teaching and learning that are increasingly viewed as restrictive and outmoded (Carroll 2007, Felix 2005, Sturm et al. 2009).

Described as a branch of the social constructivism Felix (2005) endorses, Siemens (2004) proposed ‘connectivism’ as a framework for explaining how the networking now facilitated by Web 2.0 may help ‘learning’ to take place and ‘knowledge’ to be gained in ways that intuitively seem natural and humanistic. Siemens (2004: n.p.) calls connectivism ‘a learning theory for the digital age’ and underlines the fact that ‘knowledge’ is now available from many more sources than it once was, a fact which has clear implications for the development of critical thinking skills and learner autonomy. With the appropriate guidance, and by using Web 2.0 to access sources of knowledge, whether they be web pages or other people with whom to communicate via an SNS, for example, learners – and perhaps even more so language learners, whose ‘subject’ is the communication itself – can become the independent “knowledge navigators” defined by Stepp-Greany (2002:165).

4. Study Project at Coventry University

In return for a ‘reward’ of Amazon vouchers, self-selected students on the elective University Wide Language Provision modules from a range of languages were asked to use the languages SNS Livemocha during a period of 10 weeks. The participants were following study programmes in a variety of disciplines and thus were not all specialist language learners.

At the beginning of the study the participants were asked to complete an adaptation of a shortened, online version of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) personality ‘test’. This was used to enable the examination of any possible link between the participants’ personality types and their willingness to communicate in L2 with Livemocha language partners. Data was also collected through the use of log sheets, focus group sessions and observation of the participant activity on Livemocha.
The main focus of the research was to observe what the students actually 'did' when logged in on Livemocha. To enable this, the students were asked to fill in a log sheet each time they used the site, giving details such as the length of time spent logged in, activities engaged in (drill and practice, text chat, voice chat), and what they liked and disliked. These log-sheets were inspired by the ‘learner diaries’ recommended by O’Malley and Chamot (1990); Bailey (1990); Wenden (1991) and Nunan (1992), among others, and entries referring to synchronous communication, either through the text chat, audio, or audio and video channels, would be of particular interest in this study. It was hypothesised that participants recording more numerous instances of synchronous communication with language partners were exhibiting a greater willingness to communicate, and that some links might be drawn between this and their personality type.

Focus group sessions were held at 2-week intervals and these allowed the participants to share experiences and ‘tips’ on using the website, including discussion of language learning strategies, e-learning strategies, advice for managing online communication, or even sharing technical know-how regarding the use of microphones and webcams. Finally, some observation of the participants’ activity in Livemocha was possible within the site itself. The researcher was able to search for the participants’ profiles and from these gather data on how many language partners they had added to their lists of ‘friends’, whether they had submitted any responses to the tasks included in the learning units, and, if so, what sort of feedback they had received from other members of the language learning community.

5. Findings - observation of participants’ activity in Livemocha

Accessing the profiles of participants helped to gain some indication of the extent of their engagement with both the learning material on the site and with other members of the Livemocha community. It was considered that willingness to communicate might be manifested in several ways, including in the number of ‘language partners’ or ‘friends’ added, the number of ‘mochapoints’ and ‘teacher points’ accumulated as a consequence of activity in the site, and in the number of ‘submissions’ (responses to tasks or exercises) posted on the site.

The participants were asked to report on their use of Livemocha during a period of 10 weeks. Only two of the participants used the voice recording facility and posted spoken submissions. One of these two posted 10 spoken submissions, and also posted the highest number of written submissions. This participant also provided quite a lot of feedback on the submissions of other Livemocha members, and was the most active, reflected in the high number of ‘mochapoints’ accumulated. Four participants were quite active in terms of helping their peers, posting feedback on
other members’ submissions, accepting ‘chat invitations’, and generally engaging with other Livemocha members. Three of these four had exhibited a stronger ‘extroversion’ dimension in the MBTI test, and they had also added a relatively high number of ‘friends’. It would appear that the four active students were expressing a higher ‘willingness to communicate’ than the other four, perhaps as a natural manifestation of the relatively strong extroversion dimension in their personality type, or perhaps due in some part to a greater affinity for or comfort with online communication – the social situation variable (MacIntyre et al. 1998).

5.1 Log Sheets and Focus Group sessions

The principal feature meant to attract language learners to use Livemocha is that of the possibility of authentic communication with native speakers of their target languages. For this to take place, and certainly if they were to initiate communication, the project participants could be expected to exhibit some degree of willingness to communicate. It was considered that evidence of WTC might be seen in log entries for communication ‘events’ that the participants recorded on their log-sheets. Two participants engaged in synchronous communication on most of the occasions that they signed in on the website, using mostly text-based chat, while another two were quite active in terms of asynchronous communication – email messages and feedback posted on peers’ submissions.

During the focus-group sessions the participants discussed their experiences of using the website. They saw the exercises and communication with language partners as a good way of revising and practising language that they had studied in their elective language modules, and they liked the way that reciprocity was facilitated and encouraged through the system of being automatically asked to give feedback on other members’ submissions whenever they posted a submission themselves. The participants mentioned some examples of very useful feedback having been provided on their submissions, and they liked the way this sort of collaborative learning helped develop a sense of community. One student did however report a lack of reciprocity on the part of a Russian language partner during chat sessions, but she admitted that her partner was much more proficient in English than she was in Russian.

After four weeks of using the website, several of the female participants reported having received friendship requests and chat invitations from males who seemed more interested in ‘flirting’ than in a serious language exchange. This issue had been expected, as a particular group of SNS users described in a recent Ofcom report as ‘Alpha Socialisers’ (Ofcom 2008) were also likely to take advantage of the feeling of diminished inhibition that is associated with online communication. Although some
of the participants in this study did mention that they had been asked to exchange contact details for other applications such as MSN Messenger, Facebook and Skype (by Alpha Socialisers exhibiting an excessive WTC), they seemed unfazed by such requests and they were generally considered to be a minor irritation.

Another negative issue was related to the voice recording facility in the website. Some participants said that they had tried to post spoken submissions but that they had been unable to record themselves. It was not clear if their problems were due to a lack of knowledge of how to use the sound recording widgets in the site, a faulty microphone, or due to poor configuration of microphone settings.

After six weeks of using Livemocha the participants still exhibited generally positive attitudes towards it and some seemed to have genuinely picked up the habit of signing in to engage in some language practice. These students reported feeling that they were developing real friendships with some of their language partners and were communicating with them regularly, one having transferred the communication to Skype, with its better sound quality for voice chat. Another participant said that she had accessed the website on her iPhone, which was encouraging as it suggested that Livemocha might even be seen by students as an enjoyable way to pass the time, or at least a way of making good use of otherwise ‘dead’ time. In fact, it would seem that Livemocha has several benefits in common with those listed for mobile learning generally (Comas-Quinn et al. 2009).

Overall the participants seemed to enjoy using Livemocha and most seemed very motivated by the idea of having opportunities to communicate with speakers of their target languages quite literally from all over the world. Some of the participants made more use of the website than others did, but the observations of the students’ activity in the website, together with the comments they made in the focus group sessions, provide starting points for discussion on a range of issues regarding the use of languages SNSs to supplement language learning at university.

6. Discussion

One of the overriding aims of this project was to introduce to the participants a new tool that would allow them to practise their target languages in ways that they might find enjoyable and motivating, and that might prove to be beneficial for them when examined from a number of different perspectives. From a pedagogical perspective it was considered that Livemocha offered possibilities for language learners to engage in authentic communication, collaborating with peers in a learning environment underpinned by social constructivist principles, and in which some development of learner autonomy might tacitly take place. From the perspective of learner motivation,
the key aspect was that these learners would suddenly have an additional and, crucially, immediate reason to actually be making the effort to learn a language in the first place; that of developing new friendships and communicating with native-speaker online language partners.

Some of the project participants began to interact with their language partners on a regular basis, arranging to meet online at certain times, while other interactions were of a more spontaneous nature. Ultimately, underlying the whole project was the hypothesis that willingness to communicate would be increased in this online environment, and the study’s main objective was to enable an examination of the combined influence on WTC of the variables of personality and social situation (in this case social interaction via Computer Mediated Communication or CMC), which might be observed in the participants’ activity in Livemocha.

The findings of the study suggest that languages SNSs such as Livemocha are a genuinely useful tool for language learners in that they offer ‘something for everyone’, whatever their personality type and learning preferences may be. For ‘extroverted’ learners there is the potential for voice chat with literally hundreds of native-speakers of their target language, and for more introverted learners there are the customary asynchronous communication channels. As one of the main goals of language learning – even for introverts – is to improve ability to engage in spoken, synchronous communication in the L2, whether this be interactional or transactional, being able to ‘step up’ towards this from writing emails and posting on discussion boards, through using text chat, and finally speaking via voice chat, could be a gradual, relatively anxiety-free progression that would suit many language learners. In rooms equipped with computers it is possible to use Livemocha (or one of the similar websites) as a classroom activity, and it is a convenient, fun and enjoyable way for students to practise languages in their own time between classes. Teachers encouraging students to interact with native-speaker peers in these online ‘language learning communities’ have a very important role to play, from helping them to construct appropriate conversational gambits to begin with, to raising their awareness of culturally specific discourse styles, and to guiding them towards developing an online savoir être (Byram and Zarate 1994) that will enable them to manage interactions in L2 via CMC more effectively.
Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that social networking sites for language learning and practice are a convenient, useful and potentially valuable tool for language learners and teachers. The principal feature they have to offer is the easy and immediate access to native speakers of a whole catalogue of languages, meaning that learners can interact with large numbers of members of different language communities in a meaningful and authentic context. Where languages as widely spoken (and learned) as French and Spanish (and of course English) are concerned, the number of potential language exchange partners with whom to interact via a languages SNS can be measured in tens of thousands, but it is also possible to establish contact with a great many speakers of other major languages, such as Arabic, Mandarin and Russian, as well as with speakers of less widespread languages. Given the large numbers of people already using these websites, and the fact that their user profiles can in effect be ‘browsed’ beforehand, it seems fair to say that through them learners have a good chance of making contact with like-minded language exchange partners who can truly help them to continue developing their L2 proficiency. The likelihood of making contact with partners who are genuinely serious about language learning could be increased, however, if teachers from partner institutions were to use a website such as Livemocha as a platform for language exchange projects involving students from their respective institutions.

This type of initiative has been enabled for some time already through websites such as ‘eTandem’ (Ruhr-Universität, Germany) and ‘The Mixxer’ (Dickinson College, USA), but on visiting these sites it becomes clear, from aspects such as the graphics and the large quantities of text and its general layout on the webpages, that they have been set up by academics whose project budgets were quite limited or ran for a fixed period only. In contrast, the new languages SNSs have been set up as commercial, ‘for profit’ ventures, and the entrepreneurs behind them have received the sort of financial backing that enable them to employ the services of experienced and skilled web designers. From the outset of this research project on Livemocha, it was considered that the website was indeed slick, ‘looked good’ and was enjoyable to use, and that as a result student interest and motivation to participate might remain high during the project period. However, at the same time there was some concern that the low quality of the pedagogical material – which had clearly not been put in place by academics – would negatively affect the participants’ overall appreciation of the website, and even discourage them from using it.
Although the participants were not asked to ignore the pedagogical material and drill and practice exercises, the main focus of this project was on the use they would make of the social software applications available in the SNS to communicate in L2 with native-speaker language exchange partners. The participants engaged in communication that was asynchronous – written, synchronous – written, and synchronous – spoken, and it seemed, unsurprisingly, that only those with an a more extrovert dimension to their personalities were comfortable with using the synchronous spoken option of voice chat. Although the number of voice chat events logged by the participants was small, perhaps due in part to a lack of experience with using such applications, most of them seemed generally to exhibit a considerable willingness to communicate in L2, with participants of a more introverted inclination favouring the asynchronous written channels, and more extroverted participants making use of synchronous text-based chat. Several studies have already highlighted the potential value of text-based chat for increasing learners’ WTC, and the findings of this current project would seem to reaffirm their usefulness as a sort of ‘stepping stone’ on the way to developing L2 speaking proficiency.

Development of the ability to ‘speak’ the target language is the priority for most language learners, and is a principal goal of Communicative Language Teaching. Many learners envisage or imagine themselves using L2 at some point in the future, in face-to-face communication for interactional or transactional purposes, and much time in CLT classrooms is devoted to activities in which learners speak with each other in L2, perhaps in conversation or discussion about ‘general’ topics, or through the role-playing of typical service encounters, for example. Through participation in a languages SNS such as Livemocha, authentic, ‘real use’ of L2 no longer has to be something which is envisaged as possibly taking place at some unknown time in the future, and instead learners can begin to see it as something that can take place immediately and regularly, at times and in places that are convenient for them. The authenticity and convenience of the communication are likely to have a positive impact on motivation, and it could be interesting for students to revisit reasons for learning a language, with the development of online ‘language partnerships’ – or friendships – with native-speaker peers suggested here as a new, additional motive for making the effort to learn foreign languages. With some coordination, and meeting in classrooms equipped with computers, it might also be possible for language partners to become ‘virtual classmates’ from time to time. This would depend on teachers and their counterparts in partner institutions being able to between them set up group collaborations within an SNS, arranging (if possible) for classes to take place at the same time, or at least for there to be some overlap during which their respective
students could interact with each other to complete tandem learning tasks. Assuming that students were able to strike up a good rapport with their peers in other countries, and were therefore interested and motivated to communicate with one another in their free time between classes, then this sort of initiative might enable some continuity between formal and informal learning contexts, allowing students to see some integration of their learning into their lives outside the traditional learning environment.

All of this of course acknowledges Swain’s (1985) hypothesis that productive output is necessary for successful L2 acquisition, but another justification for encouraging learners to communicate in L2, online or offline, is that being able to ‘do’ precisely this is the underlying goal of the majority of people who opt for learning a language in the first place. Relatively few people aim only to gain the ability to read or understand another language, and most want eventually to be able to say that they ‘speak’ it. Social networking sites for languages present learners with a great many opportunities to speak with native-speakers of their target languages, in an environment that is conducive to communicating in a language with the purpose of learning it. The reduction in feelings of inhibition and of language anxiety can have a very positive impact on learners’ productive performance, and the choice there is in terms of communication channels to be exploited means that a range of learner personality types is catered for.
References


The *HumBox*: a teaching and learning repository for the humanities

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**Keywords:** *HumBox*, peer review, open educational resources (OERs), digital repository

**Introduction**

The *HumBox* is an online space for the publication, sharing and managing of digital humanities resources. It is also the hub of a community of humanities professionals who are engaged in re-using and reviewing each other’s resources and making connections with each other through the *HumBox* system. It was created as part of the *HumBox* project, which was funded under the JISC/HEA Open Education Resources (OER) programme and led by the Higher Education Academy Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies (LLAS) Subject Centre, based at the University of Southampton, in collaboration with the Subject Centres for English, History and Philosophical and Religious Studies. The project ran from April 2009 to April 2010, and since that time, the community of users on the HumBox has sustained the site and grown in numbers.

The UK OER Programme aimed to make a wide variety of educational resources created by academics freely available on line for anybody to discover, use and re-purpose. It was funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in order to give the UK momentum in the growing international OER movement.

**2. Which institutions were involved?**

Each subject centre had a number of institutional partners whose role in the project was to provide teaching and learning resources to be uploaded to the *HumBox* repository. These Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) were:

- Coventry University
- The University of Warwick
- University of Glasgow
- University of Wolverhampton
- University of Portsmouth
- Aberystwyth University
- University of Leeds
- The University of Sheffield
- The University of Manchester
- University of Southampton
- Aston University
3. How did the project start?

The funding was seen as a kick-start to establish a viable self-sustaining community which would last beyond the life time of the project. The partners were initially encouraged to upload a minimum of 40 resources to the repository in any format from a simple Word file to multimedia learning objects. Although the technology underpinning the site was important, the project was not about the technology per se. The HumBox site is an adaptation of the LanguageBox, which was itself based on a version of ePrints, which is open-source research repository software developed at the University of Southampton. The overarching idea was to build the community from the bottom up, with the user community involved in the development of the repository from its inception which meant that the discussions and direction the project took was heavily influenced by the issues important to them such as quality, copyright and review. This helped to foster a feeling of ownership and meant that individuals identified themselves strongly with the project.

The repository’s design was influenced by a number of projects involving the LLAS Subject Centre and the University of Southampton which explored issues round the storing and sharing of language learning resources in a dedicated community repository. These were the L20: Sharing Language Learning Objects (JISC 2005), the Contextualised Learning Activity Repository Tools project (CLAreT) (JISC 2006), and the Language Box which was developed as part of the Faroes project (JISC 2009).

These projects had two broad areas of investigation:

1. The specific technical requirements of a digital repository for a particular teaching community, and the development of initiatives for sharing, repurposing, reviewing and editing of learning resources in the area of language teaching.

2. Establishing simple technical processes and providing teachers with considerable support in understanding how to disaggregate their material into repurposeable core resources and in how best to make material available for colleagues to share.

The Faroes project developed a repository called the Language Box which provides storage and of online digital content for use by teachers and students, and incorporates some of the key affordances of Web 2.0 technology.

4. How successful has it been?

Data from internet-tracking of HumBox shows that at the time of writing (2011) the number of registered users has nearly trebled since the launch of the site in February, 2010. The site now has over 500 registered users, with approximately 27,000 of individual visitors to the site and 170,000 page views of the site. The majority of these
new users have joined the site since the end of the funded HumBox project, which indicates ongoing, voluntary interest in the HumBox.

There are many thousands more people viewing the site and downloading resources. Visitors come from a wide range of countries (147) and from a range of media, mostly via Google or direct entry into the HumBox. This indicates that the site continues to be popular and is reaching an ever-wider audience.

The most recent contributions to the site were made by new members to the HumBox community. The total number of items in HumBox is actually far greater than the system cites – at approximately 2816. This figure differs from the number of cited resources, because some items may consist of several files, but under HumBox terminology, they would still be considered as one ‘resource’.

A peer review process has been introduced and is on-going. An active community of humanities lecturers regularly uses the site and the level of awareness of OERs in the Higher Education sector has risen substantially through the publication of a number of articles and numerous conference presentations.

5. How is the repository structured?

One of the key aims of the project was to make the HumBox user-friendly and not intimidating to potential users. Once the initial registration is complete resources can be uploaded to the site and managed from a personal account as shown in Figure 1.
The profile page (see Figure 1) is one of the main characteristics of the site. Users are able to create a profile page which enables them to showcase their teaching work and link to their home page. It also includes recently published items; comments members have made on their resource; whether it has been downloaded or remixed; a list of their bookmarked items and any collections of resources they may have produced. A collection is a number of resources with a common theme.

The profile page allows the users to see how your resources are being used and allows them to see how the resources of others are being used. It also acts as a way for them to present the teaching side of their profession, perhaps to complement an already existing research profile and provides the opportunity for them to see the impact of their teaching materials beyond your own institution.

Figure 2: Resource Description and Upload Page

The resource description page is where users upload resources and input metadata describing the resource. This page has been kept intentionally simple and demands a minimal amount of metadata, so that users are not deterred from sharing their teaching resources by the need to complete an onerous amount of descriptive information.
The resource page contains the following information: preview screen; description; key words and tags; the date of the deposit; the name of the depositor; languages; attribution; number of downloads and the specific nature of the ‘Creative Commons’ licence. This screen provides an immediate impression of what the resource is to the user which helps them make a rapid decision about whether they want to use it.

Granularity is an important part of the repository’s design: it is not complete courses that are on offer but resources based around one teaching point or theme. These can be gathered in collections of resources. This ensures maximum ‘shareability’ and provides contributors with the opportunity to showcase their work rather than supplying all of the resources for a particular course or module.
At the bottom of the resource page users have the opportunity to engage with the resources either by bookmarking them; downloading them and remixing them; using the Toolbox; commenting on how they have used the resource or providing further information which could enhance it. The ‘comments’ area has proved popular with users, as many find that their resources are enhanced by useful comments provided here.

6. Why use the HumBox?

A survey from 2010 (LLAS) found numerous reasons why academics have chosen to use the HumBox including finding out what other institutions and practitioners are doing; to share practice and have work reviewed, to find useful resources to use or adapt, to find new ideas to enhance practice, to keep up with new developments, to provide an opportunity for early career researchers to showcase their research and teaching materials and also to provide an opportunity to see perspectives from other humanities disciplines. This is a summary of their responses:

6.1 What is good about the HumBox?

- Easy and intuitive
- Open access
- Variety of teaching materials included
- Wealth of resources
- Gives the opportunity to share good practice
- Can adapt materials
- Sense of community
- Targeted at humanities community
- Good presentation
- Resources easy to download
- Good quality materials

6.2 Why is the HumBox useful?

- To see what other institutions and practitioners are doing
- To share practice on standard aspects of learning e.g. study skills
- To help with finding useful resources to adapt for own students
- To help practitioners reflect on their own teaching
- To find ideas to improve/enhance one’s own practice by seeing new/innovative ways of presenting material
- To keep up with developments in the discipline
- To help early career researchers to demonstrate teaching experience and communicate research work
- To see things from the perspective of other humanities disciplines
*HumBox* is a popular site that continues to grow in numbers of resources and registered users. Users find it to be a rich site for both resources and ideas and an intuitive and attractive place through which to share their own work. A smaller number of users are engaged in deeper activity in relation to *HumBox*’s OERs, and are downloading, editing and repurposing resources, or commenting/reviewing the work of others.

**Conclusion and future developments**

One of the main objectives is to involve more language practitioners, however, Atenas (2011) has argued that there are three reasons why a strong sharing culture has not developed: ‘Using someone else’s resources, the fear of being plagiarised and the fear to look as someone that is plagiarising somebody else’. However, Kernohan (2011) has argued that the current changes to the HE fee regime and the concomitant budgetary scrutiny means that OERs are becoming ‘an essential part of academic practice’.

It is also hoped that the *HumBox* will be improved, for example with the introduction of a discussion forum and email alerts when new resources are added. The review and comment facility has grown organically with some users actively seeking reviewers to test their materials on. There is certainly scope to make this facility more sophisticated. Finally, users have requested an improvement in the data which shows how often resources have been viewed and downloaded.

The *HumBox* is currently being used in at least two separate research projects and it will continue to evolve as a tool for the UK humanities teaching community, in response to feedback and user comments. Tracking of *HumBox* resources and research into how open access repositories serve their communities will also be ongoing as *HumBox* moves forward.

To find out more about *HumBox* and sign up, please visit [www.humbox.ac.uk](http://www.humbox.ac.uk). School and college teachers are welcome to sign up too.
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Digital Literacies and The Language Classroom (plenary talk)

Gavin Dudeney, The Consultants-E, Barcelona

Keywords: digital literacies, ELT, net generation, digital natives, digital immigrants

Introduction

This talk aims to discuss at technology access and the changing face of today's learners. It will consider the concept of new digital literacies before moving on to examine how these can be addressed through the use of new technologies whilst not significantly impacting on the current pedagogical or methodological approaches favoured by classroom teachers.

2. Technology Today

At the time of writing this (2011), young people have more access to technology than ever before: from gaming machines to mobile phones, fast Internet access at home and on the move and, increasingly, at school as new initiatives bring interactive whiteboards, electronic content, netbooks and other technological tools into their learning.

In terms of leisure, a study by the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC) and the Fundació Catalana de l’Esplai (2009) concluded that almost 97% of Spanish adolescents between the ages of twelve and eighteen have had some access to the Internet, with nearly 54% of those users having taught themselves the basics, and a mere 16% having received some training at school. Other noteworthy statistics from the ongoing study include almost 95% use of email as a form of communication (though Messenger remains the preferred communication tool for most) and a preference for mobile phones as a primary source of communication between social groups (Universitat Oberta de Catalunya 2009).

The above study supports data from other countries in terms of primary uses of technology, which are mostly combined to the synchronous, social side of real-time communications with friends, online (and offline) gaming and the use of media such as music and movies online, with very few engaging in productive activities such as keeping blogs or similar, though in my experience, photoblogs continue to prove popular among adolescents. This lack of the use of ‘participatory’ technological tools is worth noting (see ‘Today’s learners’ below) having, as it does, real implications for any introduction of technology in the classroom.
What is apparent in most studies on youth technology use is that they are more connected than ever before: connected to each other outside of class time, primarily through synchronous tools such as Microsoft Messenger and the ubiquitous mobile phone, but also (for those who use the Net to help with their learning: nearly 70% of the users in the study) to other sources of information and learning which can impact on how they view what they do and learn in class.3

Although advances in educational uses of ICT are now more commonplace within many school systems, there is still some way to go in terms of implementation of infrastructure, development of suitable electronic content and teacher training. This last factor is crucial in terms of teacher use of technology in the classroom, and breaking down the ‘digital literacy divide’ between teachers and today’s learner.

3. Today’s learners

Much has been made in recent years of the perceived digital divide in terms of technological knowledge between what Prensky (2001) popularised as the ‘digital natives’ (those born into a world with widespread access to technology) and ‘digital immigrants’ (those born before such access became commonplace in much of the developed world).

Whilst Prensky (2009) himself has since moved on from these polemical terms to a more knowledge-based view of the changes occurring in society, much stock is still placed in the supposed difference in skills level and experience between young people and their elders, and this difference is equally widely deemed to be leading to a significant disjuncture in what learners expect from their school and college experience, and what they actually receive.4

Young people who belong to the so-called ‘Net generation’ (Tapscott 1999), it is argued, are highly-skilled and regular users of technologies such as blogs, wikis and podcasts, spend most of their time online and are rarely parted from their games machines or mobile phones. Whilst it is certainly true that most young people in many developed countries today have extensive access to various types of technologies (see above) there is still quite a gap in what they do with these technologies and what educators in the ‘immigrant’ fold might otherwise imagine.

In fact, many commissioned reports across the globe reflect what might be called a purely social use of technologies. One such report carried out for the Channel 4 television station in the UK concluded:

3 For more on informal learning and connectivism, see Siemens (2005)

4 For a critique of this view, see Bennett, Maton and Kervin (2008)
Young people’s immersion in these devices and the time spent on them is not due to an obsession with the technology per se, but largely due to the gadgets’ ability to facilitate communication and to enhance young people’s enjoyment of traditional pursuits. For most, the focus of their passion is not so much the device itself, but more about how it can help them connect, relax or have fun. The technology itself is “invisible” to the young consumer. (OTX Research 2009)

This gives some credence to Prensky’s (2008) assertion that ‘digital natives’ tend to speak of technology in the form of verbs (whereas educators generally tend to use nouns) and also fits in with Bax’s (2003) notion of ‘normalisation’, where technology only realises its potential when it ceases to be noteworthy or ‘special’ within any given context.

However, this level of comfort with certain technologies, this ‘invisibility’ does not necessarily carry over into any tangible or positive benefits in terms of their learning. As Sansone (2008) notes, ‘natives’ are too often described as ‘tech savvy’ when what we really mean is that they are ‘tech comfy’: that is that they are comfortable with technology, but not necessarily in a good position to put it to work in service of their knowledge and learning. He argues that perhaps a part of a new educator role may be to assist in the transformation from practical, social use of technology to a more rigorous, pedagogical use.

Given the kind of data revealed in reports such as the OTX one, it is difficult to see how an educator’s view of technologies in teaching will work towards bridging the gap between the ‘natives’ and the ‘immigrants’. ELT exponents well-versed in the use of technologies regularly assume that the ubiquity of technologies in their learners’ lives will lead to a ready acceptance, say, of the use of blogs and wikis for reading and writing, podcasts for audio practice and other such approaches, whereas these may simply be written off as insufficiently ‘social’ or ‘entertaining by their intended audience.

As the OTX report concludes:

> Traditional activities such as hanging out with friends, listening to music, and seeing boy / girlfriends dominate the top three favourite pastimes of young people, while “digital” behaviours such as creating user generated content have a much lower penetration than commonly perceived (only 16% of young people have written a blog and less than a quarter (21%) have filmed and uploaded a clip to a site like YouTube). (OTX Research 2009)

Whilst these kinds of tools certainly can work in classroom contexts, it is often in the face of considerable resistance on the part of younger learners. In these circumstances, teachers can engage in more successful and constructive technology-
driven instruction through the integration of more traditional tools and techniques in their standard repertoire.

More advanced techniques such as the use of blogs, wikis and other social-constructivist media along with the use of synchronous tools such as voice and text chat, video-conferencing and similar may be introduced at a later date, when teachers have reached a comfort level with such tools, and learners have seen stimulating and attractive examples with which they can identify.

4. Digital Literacies

Traditionally, literacy has referred to the basic skills of reading and writing, occasionally coupled with basic numeracy and referred to as the ‘3 r’s’ (reading, writing and arithmetic). With the proliferation of digital media, however, commentators have come to consider a wider range of skills as figuring in a new definition of ‘digital literacy’. Pegrum (2009) explores these new literacies in some detail, highlighting, amongst others:

- **Print and texting literacies:** whilst print literacy is a familiar typology, texting literacy remains the domain of regular mobile phone users and is much maligned in educational circles for the purported detrimental effect it is having on literacy. In fact, as Crystal (2008) points out, “typically less than 10 percent of the words in text messages are actually abbreviated in any way”,

- **Personal, participatory and intercultural literacies:** these literacies come to the forefront in social networking spaces and other online media where personalisation occurs. They may include blogs and wikis, as well as social networks such as Facebook. In such spaces users not only write about themselves and their lives, but also participate in wide social groupings which transcend more closed groupings in terms of ethnicity, religion, geography, etc.,

- **Search and information literacies:** in many ways, these are two of the most important literacies for any learner to acquire - the ability not only to find information amongst the mass of sites and sources afforded by technologies, but also to evaluate that information according to a set of criteria relevant to its intended purpose,

- **Remix literacy:** this form of literacy refers to the modern trend of ‘remixing’ pictures, videos and other media, often with striking effect. This may refer, for example, to the trend for making ‘literal versions’ of music videos (search for ‘literal versions’ on YouTube), through remixing music videos for political or satirical ends to the doctoring of digital images. In each instance, a recognition of the ‘remix’ that has taken place is crucial to an understanding of the media being viewed.
Clearly, then, this is a complicated mix of skills to master, and teachers can play a part in helping learners acquire some of the necessary skills by integrating them into their classroom practice alongside the regular ‘content’ they deal with. In this way we can make a difference in our learners’ comfort level, helping them beyond the ‘tech comfy’ to the ‘tech savvy’ which will contribute to their life beyond school as they move into the professional workplace and (increasingly) knowledge-based economies.

The workshop reflections by Laura Pibworth below illustrate how multilingual multiliteracies can be developed with software that is freely available on the www.

References


A reflective report on Gavin Dudeney’s interactive workshop with practical digital multilingual multiliteracy tips for the busy language teacher

Laura Pibworth, Lecturer in Italian, Department of English and Languages, Coventry University

Following on from Gavin Dudeney’s plenary, that gave an overview of ‘Digital Literacies’ (2011a), conference delegates were invited to participate in an interactive workshop to try out some free resources available to them. This report will look at 6 different ‘ways of working’ suggested by Dudeney (2011b); working with images, videos, words, websites, audio, dialogues and presentations, and illustrate some ways in which these freely available tools could be used in the language learning classroom.

1. Working with images

As mentioned by Pegrum (2009), one of the new literacies for consideration, amongst others, is ‘remix literacy’, mixing pictures, video and other media to create something new. A resource suggested by Dudeney is the website Photofunia (2012), an ‘online photo editing tool’, which allows users to add effects and customise images, and create photo montages for use in the classroom.

Dudeney (2011b) suggested that a series of images could be edited with a photo of the teacher or a celebrity, which could then be used as a basis for a piece of creative writing to narrate the photo montage, or to prepare questions and ‘interview’ the character in the photos. For learners of a lower level, these pictures could be rearranged to form a logical series of events. To prepare the activity one or more photos are needed (in .jpeg .gif or .png under 10MB), and the teacher will need to employ some basic design skills to edit their pictures. It is important to bear in mind that some of the effects may not be appropriate for younger learners.
2. Working with video

In his workshop, Dudeney recommended the use of a video entitled ‘Where the Hell is Matt?’ (2008), showing a man dancing in 42 different countries, as the basis for a range of different tasks. Vocabulary learning associated with travel – countries, nationalities or languages, or practising describing past actions or future plans, based on one of the places featured in the video. Dudeney emphasised that although the video can be used flexibly, it is important to consider the cognitive demands and language requirement of learners and that the pre- and post- task activities ‘frame’ the video in the context of a lesson.

![Figure 1: Where the Hell is Matt?(2008)](image)

3. Working with words

Dudeney introduced the concept of a ‘word cloud’ and a website to create word clouds, Wordle (2011). Text is inputted and a word cloud generated, which can then be saved or printed, or shared online in a gallery. It was suggested that a haiku could be provided to learners in word cloud format, which needed to be reformulated in the haiku format (a 3-line unrhymed verse with lines of 5, 7 and 5 syllables). Alternative activities suggested included pre-teaching vocabulary before a reading or listening activity, and the reconstruction of sentences or dialogues, although careful consideration for the number of words inputted was recommended. The gallery on the Wordle (2011) site is public and the word cloud content is not filtered, therefore may not be appropriate for younger learners.
4. Working with audio

Whilst there are podcasts that are already freely available for download by learners, for example ‘elementary podcasts’ produced by the British Council (2012), it is also possible for learners (or teachers) to record their own podcasts, share them with others (both learners and other site users) and leave comments and feedback. Dudeney recommended Podomatic (2012) for this, suggesting that learners could record a short clip that invites comments and feedback from other learners, both on the content and the language of the podcast. It was also suggested that the podcasts could be used for dictations, interviews and giving opinions on a topic. With regard to technical considerations, lower level learners may need some support using the site, only short podcasts can be recorded due to storage limitations, and learners need recording equipment of a reasonable quality.

5. Working with dialogues

Dudeney (2011b) recommended dvolver moviemaker (n.d) to create vibrant animated videos, and share them easily via social media or email. Suggested activities included creating dialogues using social or functional language, for example meeting new people or finding out information.
The website is straightforward to use, learners can select different background and characters for their dialogue, and then input a limited amount of text, and the video is generated almost immediately. As seen in Figure 1, this tool can be transferred to the learning of foreign languages, in this example it was used to practise greetings in a Beginners’ Italian class at Coventry University after Gavin’s workshop. As with the other tools mentioned, the content can sometimes be unsuitable, but the students had great fun with creating and scripting little cartoon videos in Italian.

6: Working with presentations

Gavin Dudeney recommended the use of VoiceThread (2012), which can be used to create photo or video slideshows, add text or audio descriptions and notes to the images or video. The additional dimensions that can be added to this presentation, rather than a traditional ‘powerpoint’ style, could be used by learners to produce a slideshow telling a story, to describe their daily routine or teach others an aspect of their culture. It could also be used to show the stages of a research project. The quality of the images and video used and the audio recording equipment need to be considered, and the privacy settings on the site are also important.

References


Contributors

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**Erika Corradini** is an academic coordinator at LLAS Centre for languages linguistic and area studies at the University of Southampton. Erika was digital rights officer for the *Humbox* project and is involved in a number of OER projects for which she monitors copyright and intellectual property rights (IPR) issues arising from publishing open access resources. In this capacity, she liaises with legal services and OER users in order to facilitate interaction between these parties.
Gavin Dudeney is Director of Technology at The Consultants-E and Chair of the IATEFL Electronic Committee (ElCom). He has worked in the field of educational technologies for nearly twenty years. Author of *The Internet & The Language Classroom* (CUP 2000, 2007) and co-author (with Nicky Hockly) of *How to Teach English with Technology* (Longman 2007) he is currently working on a new book on digital literacies (to be published by Pearson in 2012, with Nicky Hockly and Dr. Mark Pegrum). Gavin’s award-winning company specialises in teacher training and development and the application of technologies in the education sector.

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**Laura Pibworth** is a lecturer and research assistant working in the department of English and Languages at Coventry University. Her research interests include Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) through Social Networking Sites. Laura has published work in her areas of interest.

**Elena Polisca** is Senior Language Tutor at the University of Manchester and is responsible for the delivery and organisation of all language modules within the division of Italian Studies. She has a strong interest in e-learning and Computer-Mediated Communication and has worked on a series of language projects delivered over the Internet. She has also been working on outreach projects with local secondary schools. She is a Co-founder of the VLE’s Languages User Group with Marina Orsini-Jones and colleagues from Nottingham Trent University and LSE. She is currently working on a project on feedback and is investigating novel ways of giving, and engaging students in the feedback process. She has published articles on her projects and has presented widely at national and international conferences. She has organised a number of language-related conferences and workshops.
Despite the advent of the English Baccalaureate, many schools are still lagging behind in their Modern Foreign Languages provision. It is more important than ever that we work in partnership to get across the message that languages are important. The message certainly rang loud and clear at this conference, and I would welcome further opportunities for our schools to be involved in such work.

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