



Real World Uses of Technology to Enrich Language Learning

¹Larry W Riggs, ²Sandra Hellyer-Riggs

Butler University¹, IUPUI University² (United States)
lriggs@butler.edu, sjhellyer@bsu.edu

Abstract

This paper is intended to contribute to the increasingly interesting and useful literature on application of technologies in teaching and learning languages. Enabling students to construct knowledge in active-learning environments is vital, as is enriching their total experience in the language they are learning. It is important that real-world examples be given by those advocating the use of new technologies. With that in mind, this presentation gives an account of some uses of technology being made, by students and faculty, in the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures & Cultures at Butler University. An excellent example of technology's creating space for student initiative is one senior French major's independent creation of Skype sessions with English students at a French high school. Beginning as an exchange of help with pronunciation issues in both French and English, these sessions have become a forum for discussion, in both languages, of cultural and academic differences between the US and France. Panopto is being used extensively to enable students to produce much more language and to listen to and critique their own production. Also, oral exams are being given on Panopto, and instructors can listen to and annotate oral "drafts" of student oral presentations. An error code is used, just as is done in annotating written productions, with patterns of error marked by time indicators. Some faculty have expanded their availability to students with virtual office hours and recorded supplemental explanations of difficult concepts and structures. Rich language production by students, and student-faculty interaction, have increased despite inevitable limits on institutional investment in mediated classrooms and other instructional resources. Many more examples will be given in the completed paper.

1. Introduction

Information and computer technology [ICT] offers many learning opportunities for students of languages, and the use of computers in classrooms can undoubtedly enhance a language teacher's performance. This paper presents concrete, real-world examples of how one Modern Language Department uses technology to enhance students' learning experiences in and out of the classroom. Different technological examples will be described, in addition to any positive and negative results associated with the implementation. The different languages taught in the Department are French, Chinese, Spanish, Italian, and German.

Students learning a new language need a great deal of language support. Sheer volume of language used, heard, and read is vital. Often there is not enough time during allotted class periods to interact with each student individually. With ICT, faculty can utilize different forms of technology to give students individual attention that does not consume class time and does not require that student and instructor be physically together. Technology's integration in foreign



language teaching demonstrates the shift in educational paradigms from a behavioral to a constructivist learning approach. Language is a form of action, so the best way to learn a language is in interactive, authentic environments. Computer technologies and the Internet are powerful tools for assisting these approaches to language teaching. Even though constructivism is not a theory associated with using technology, constructivist assumptions are guideposts for developing a vision for integrating technology into the language curriculum [1. Brown, 1997]. Multiplying opportunities for students to construct—to co-produce—their own skills and knowledge is always positive, and a number of technologies do that.

According to [5] Liaw [1997], teachers should offer language learners a language-rich environment in which learners are constantly engaged in language activities. Students need to be able to interact with each other so that learning through communication can occur. Computers can help create this type of environment. The computer can act as a tool to increase the volume of verbal exchange. In a study conducted by Liaw [1997], computer books were used to investigate whether computers increase verbal interaction between students. Computer books are interactive stories that appear on the computer screen as actual books with text and illustrations. There are also a variety of interactive choices students can make to enhance the story, including real voices that read aloud, music, and sound effects. The story is also highlighted, so readers can follow along with the text. The study concluded that verbal interactions and the use of different language functions by language learners can be facilitated by using the computer. The computer-book-reading environment fostered language development by providing opportunities for verbal interaction and was a good supplement to the traditional curriculum.

[4] Kang and Dennis [1995] wrote, "Any attempt to treat vocabulary learning as learning of isolated facts certainly will not promote real vocabulary knowledge." Students need to learn vocabulary in context and with visual clues to help them understand and retain. Computers can provide a rich, contextual environment. The computer also allows students to become active learners in a one-on-one environment. Computers can incorporate various learning strategies as well as accommodate a variety of learning styles without overburdening classroom and instructor time.

In another study, [3] Hertel [2003] described an intercultural e-mail exchange at the college level in which U.S. students in a beginning Spanish class and Mexican students in an intermediate English as a Second Language class corresponded weekly for one semester. Survey results revealed that this student-centered approach had the potential to change cultural attitudes, increase knowledge and awareness of other cultures, foster language acquisition, and boost student interest and motivation in both language and cultural studies.

[2] Bernhardt, Rivera and Kamil [2004] conducted a study to examine the practicality and efficiency of Web-based placement testing for college-level language programs. Qualitative analysis of the data indicated that students, administrators, and instructors benefited from the online placement tests. For students, accessing a placement test at their convenience without making an extra summer trip to campus was seen as a significant and positively motivating time-saver. Having students participate in an academic exercise prior to arriving on campus sends a positive message regarding the importance and prestige of the language program at the university. For administrators, the time saved by eliminating this extra step during a summer orientation period is significant. Supervisors and instructors reported that more effective decisions



were made when they had time to contemplate their students' performances, which brought them greater confidence in their curriculum when they encountered students at the beginning of a class session.

The Internet has broken down communication's distance barrier. Therefore, students can build partnerships with learning peers in target languages through the Internet. The main ways of communicating on the Internet include e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms, and bulletin boards. With MSN and Yahoo!, students can not only send instant messages, but also have audio and video conversations that greatly motivate and improve their speaking and listening abilities.

Pioneers of using Skype in the classroom immediately noted the potential for international connections between classrooms and students [6] [Waters, 2008]. This is a natural fit for language educators interested in having cross-cultural exchanges as well as language exchanges among students using Skype. Skype is a communication tool that allows users to make audio and video calls over the Internet. These calls are free to other Skype users. Skype also offers a computer-to-land-line service for both local and international calls. The computer-to-land-line service is fee-based. Skype is an excellent tool to help teachers build skills using technology. It incorporates high levels of verbal interaction between users, or in this case between teachers and students. In the second language classroom, Skype can be used to provide a variety of authentic learning experiences to students, including an interview with an author or other native speaker of the target language, or an international collaborative project with other classrooms.

2. Uses of Technology

The actual uses of technology being made in Butler University's Modern Languages, Literatures & Cultures department implement some suggestions found in these studies and, to a significant degree, confirm the findings of the studies. An excellent example of technology's creating space for student initiative is one senior French major's independent creation of Skype sessions with English students at a French high school. Beginning as an exchange of help with pronunciation issues in both French and English, these sessions became a forum for discussion, in both languages, of cultural and academic differences between the US and France. The French major reported several very positive results of this opportunity created through Skype: the French students became more interested when they realized that our student spoke good French, and they began to express their curiosity about life here; both our student and the French students became more confident, willing second-language speakers; and, our student was motivated to apply for a job teaching English in France. His application was successful.

Our specialist in linguistics uses YouTube and other Internet sources to provide his students with a large volume of native-speaker language to analyze and try to imitate. This faculty member requires his students to do in-class presentations in which they analyze regional accents and dialects, discursive registers, vocabulary and slang, and other linguistic aspects of native-speaker language productions. He also uses Facebook groups for forums and some homework that requires the students to record themselves in video and discuss a linguistic issue. Other resources he uses are PowerPoint presentations, Blackboard for posting grades and class materials, and Quia for homework in lower level language classes.



Several of our faculty members make extensive use of film in both intermediate language courses and upper-level culture courses. The huge volume of films and film segments available online means that classroom time need not be spent on viewing films and that students can study particular parts of films that they want to report or comment on. One of our professors makes systematic use of films in a third-year grammar and composition course to illustrate and reinforce grammatical points. Students are asked to write paragraphs, using the grammar currently being studied, summarizing or commenting on 15-minute sections of the films.

Another of our professors uses Quia to create opportunities for students to do self-graded activities. His students do all of their daily homework assignments on that site. In his writing course, this faculty member has his students use online library databases to find peer-reviewed articles that serve as models for their writing. One colleague reports using films and other online video materials in her civilization course both to provide subject matter for reports and commentaries and to supplement the course content in areas that were not given very thorough coverage. She uses YouTube video accounts of historical events being studied to provide native-speaker language models, supplement the course's content, and give points of view different from her own. In covering the Industrial Revolution in France, for example, she showed a video emphasizing its negative effects, and another highlighting the positives.

One faculty member reports making extensive use of Panopto. In the Modern Language Center or at home, her students can record themselves in either audio or audio-visual format. This professor has her students do their oral exams on Panopto, which enables her to listen to and annotate the performances, marking error-patterns. This, in turn, enables the students to re-record the performances, in effect applying the principles of process writing and re-writing to oral work. Discussions can be conducted on Panopto, too, and this faculty member uses the same annotation and error-coding method to evaluate discussions. Students can use Panopto to listen to a native-speaker model and then record, evaluate, and re-record their own oral work. This professor also uses Panopto to conduct virtual office hours, record lectures and explanations, and provide supplemental exercises. She uses Pollanywhere.com to conduct surveys, with either multiple-choice or open-ended questions, on culturally important topics that students might be hesitant to discuss in the classroom. A German professor, this colleague used this method, which allows students to express themselves anonymously, to allow a discussion of female genital mutilation among immigrants in Germany. She also uses Pollanywhere.com to measure opinion tendencies among her students and thus to be prepared for potential controversies. Creating a safe environment for expression of students' opinions is always pedagogically important, and this technology serves that purpose admirably.

In making these and other uses of technology, our students and faculty have, for the most part, achieved positive results. Inevitably, some issues have arisen. The French major who Skyped with French students reports that the quality of reception was somewhat uneven and that a webcam was not always available. Format compatibility of films can be a problem, and our department plans to purchase two machines that will show films in any format. Institutional commitment to providing technology and support is vital and is sometimes disappointing. Overall, our pedagogy, at all levels of instruction and in all the languages, has been enhanced by our uses of technology.



References

1. Brown, A. (1997). Transforming schools into communities of thinking and learning about serious matters. *American Psychologist*, 52(9), 399-413.
2. Bernhardt, E.B., Rivera, R.J., & Kamil, M.L. (2004). The practicality and efficiency of web-based placement testing for college-level programs. *Foreign Language Annals* (37), 356-366.
3. Hertel, T. (2003). Using an email exchange to promote cultural learning. *Foreign Language Annals* (36)3, 386-396.
4. Kang, S & Dennis, J. (1995). The effects of computer-enhanced vocabulary lessons on achievement of ESL students. *Computers in the Schools*, 11(3) 25-35.
5. Liaw, M. (1997). An analysis of ESL children's verbal interaction during computer book reading. *Computers in the Schools*, 13(3/4), 55-73.
6. Waters, S. (2008). Skype Other Classrooms! <http://theedublogger.com/want-to-connect-with-other-classrooms/>