

Integrating the World Wide Web into Language Courses

Pete Sharma

This article looks at some ways in which we have used the World Wide Web to help our students study grammar and vocabulary, and improve their listening skills. It argues that when used as part of an integrated approach involving both face-to-face teaching and learners using the web, technology can be used in exciting ways which can enhance language learning.



In the Executive Language school where I work, we can take our students into our self access centre at any time during a lesson, and let them access the Internet on individual computers using a fast (ADSL) connection. We therefore teach, and integrate technology into courses as and when appropriate.

What is on the Web?

One of my favourite answers to this question is: "What isn't!" Of importance to Business English teachers are of course company sites and annual reports. These often contain product descriptions, pictures, graphs and diagrams. There is a wealth of financial data on the Web, as well as specialist dictionaries and of course, much much more. The interactive nature of such material is what makes the Web an exciting environment. Material can be authentic, current, relevant and motivating.

Grammar

In all our courses, we review grammar usually through the use of language tasks and framework materials. David Eastment et al (*The Internet*, OUP) suggest using the power of search engines for enriching grammar practice. In a "Grammar search" activity, learners use this search facility on the Web in order to explore meanings of a grammatical item in context, such as the use of modal verbs.

First, the teacher brainstorms uses of the target structure, capitalising on any disagreement. Any such ambiguity about usage can be used to create questions, to be answered by the activity. At the computer, the learners use www.google.com to search for phrases, such as: "*Euro will rise*"; "*Euro might rise*"; "*Euro may rise*" etc. They analyse the results to determine the context in which the chosen modal verbs have been used.

The learners report back to the group and decide whether the differences of opinion which emerged before the search have been resolved. This exercise can be performed using any area of language in which 'real-world' examples can help to clarify apparent inconsistency in usage.

The nature of electronic text means teachers can clip a piece from the web and customise it. Teachers can select a short paragraph from a suitable site on the Web, then cut and paste the article into a *Word* document. They then delete the articles (*a / an / the*) and ask learners to reconstruct the text. Students work together to decide where and whether to insert them. Finally, the learners read their text aloud and justify the inclusion of any article.

Clearly there will be situations which are not clear cut, but then this activity, similarly, is excellent for awareness-raising.

Much web-based grammar material views grammar as "product". This can sometimes be disappointing for teachers, who may espouse more communicative approaches. The activities above, however, focus on grammar as process, and accord with Scott Thornbury's central argument in his superb "*Uncovering Grammar*".

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COURSE DETAILS

Dates: 15 – 21 February 2003 (Sat – Fri, 8:30 am – 6:30 pm)
02 – 08 August 2003

Participants: Maximum 14

Trainers: Rebecca Chapman (UK), Rupert Sage (UK), J.C. LaFond, (US)

Requirements: University or first degree, relevant teaching qualification, at least one year's experience teaching EFL, 100% attendance and participation

Certification: An assessment sheet for each candidate will be submitted to ARELS. Candidates must also submit a Business English assignment (approx. 3,000 words) within 6 weeks of the end of the course and achieve a minimum of 50%.

Course Costs: € 1.120,- incl. 20% VAT, certification fee and materials

For more information, contact Rebecca Chapman at
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Tel: (+43 – 1) 533 70 01-0 Fax: (+43 – 1) 532 85 21
home page: www.blc.co.at/TeacherTraining/CertTEB/index.html

Vocabulary

The web of course provides a wealth of specialist texts which often contain the exact pieces of language required by ESP learners, such as the collocations they need to give a presentation.

We often ask students to select their own text from the Internet. This they submit to the teacher in advance of the lesson. The teacher and student can work together to highlight the relevant expressions. The teacher's role is to help the student to record the vocabulary in such a way as to retrieve it, perhaps using grids (such as a 1-5 box in *Implementing the Lexical Approach*) or a card-index system – a box containing blank cards for students to store key words and phrases in ways that they can retrieve them. It is not essential to know the exact collocations the learner needs – these can often be discovered by the students themselves. The wealth of texts on the Web has helped ESP teachers immeasurably.

Listening

Using streaming audio and video on the BBC has enabled us to incorporate current listening material into our courses. There are certainly a number of benefits from using the Web for listening practice, alongside CD-audio and cassettes from publishers, authentic videos, CD-ROMs etc.

The learner can be in charge of the controls, e.g., on the BBC news site, there is a slider below the recording of the news, allowing the learner to move through the clip, pause and repeat certain sections at will. The length of the clip is displayed, and this clock is useful in helping learners locate a specific point in the clip.

According to research findings, one of the “best aid(s) to comprehension is to use normal speaking speed with extra pauses inserted”. News clips can be authentic, interesting and challenging. Moreover, learners can access the Web as

a source of listening at any time in his / her office, or at home, and introducing them to this service increases the chance that they use it post-course.

Learners can first listen to a news clip and then read the related article. Our learners really appreciate this follow-up activity, and the chance to see the recently-heard lexical items in context.

The World Wide Web has greatly changed the way we teach languages. We now teach, but search engines, digital listening and CD-ROM software provide a raft of tools which enable us to facilitate learning through technology. Perhaps both teaching and learning have never been so enriching.

The practical teaching ideas in this article are taken from *The Internet and Business English* (Summertown 2003) by Barney Barrett and Pete Sharma. Framework worksheets are available to download in PDF format on the Summertown web-site: www.summertown.co.uk.

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