ENHANCING THE CLASS WEBSITE WITH ADDITIONAL FEATURES
(WEB STATISTICS, CHAT ROOM, SEARCH ENGINE, DICTIONARY)

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Nowadays, with the wide accessibility of the Net, extremely easy access to free webspace and user-friendly and intuitive Web editors making it possible to create an Internet website without any knowledge of HTML, more and more language teachers decide to make a class website for their lessons of English, where they could publish students' works on the one hand, and on the other include grammar and vocabulary exercises. In this way, learning is not confined to the classroom only, but students can work on the classroom materials in a self-study mode at their own pace.

Due to that, this month's A Word from a Techie is devoted to the issue of enhancing the class website with additional features extremely useful in the process of learning a foreign language, such as web statistics, a search engine, a dictionary and a chat room.

I. Web statistics

At first, the question to be answered is the following: what does the teacher/owner of the website need web statistics? Obviously, it is interesting to know whether the site is visited, how often, who the visitors come from or how much time they spend on the website. Here the distintion needs to be made between hit counters and Web statistics. The former are just counters displaying the number of visitors, which can be seen while accessing the page. It is often claimed that hit counters may not be the true reflection of the site's popularity, as some site owners could purposefully access their own website a number of times in order to increase the number on the hit counter and in this way create the impression of the site being popular and worth visiting in this way. Also, a hit counter does not give any other information apart from the total number of visitors, which is not very informative for the site owner. Therefore, it is much better to use comprehensive web statistics services, which do not reveal any information to the visitors of the site, but its owner can see the total number of visitors, the number of visitors each month, week, day, hour; the addresses of computers visiting the site most often, as well as the last fifty visitors to the site, with the time of the visit. In this

way, the teacher is given plenty of information on the visitors, which can be used to check if students do access the website to do the homework assigned.

In order to use such a service, one needs to find some Web company offering free-of-charge comprehensive Web statistics. In case of Poland it is http://stat.webmedia.pl, but surely corresponding ones can be found in other countries as well.

Putting the web statistics in the class homepage is very easy, and means just following these simple steps (of course, this refers to the specific procedure of Webmedia, and in case of other services there might be some changes):

❑ Go to http://stat.webmedia.pl

❑ Fill in the registration form for Stat 4 U statistics

❑ Specify the email address so that the code and the password could be sent to it

❑ Copy the code sent to your email address

❑ Open your homepage in a web editor

❑ Paste the code in the relevant place in the document

❑ Make sure that the code is exactly the same as the one sent to you (we might not be aware of the fact that sometimes what you copy is NOT exactly what you paste, especially <> signs)

❑ Save the document

❑ Connect to your server via FTP and upload the page

❑ Open the Internet browser to check the statistics report (click on the icon, give the password and see the generated report)

II. Chat room

A chat room on the class website is a unique opportunity to conduct chat sessions either within the classroom during the lesson or with some other partner classroom if there is an exchange established. Thanks to the fact that the chat room is connected to the website, there is no need to set up any special IRC software on all workstations in the lab, and there is little likelihood of unwanted chatters in the room, which is in contrast to widely accessible chat services such as Yahoo. Also, as the chat room resides in the website on the local server, it will be much quicker to load and work than some services on more remote servers.

The teacher has two basic options to choose: either get a chat room from some chat room server, which will mean connecting to the server each time to get the room; or make a chat room as a Java applet, residing on the local server and loading a chat room. In fact, it is the

question of speed of connection: a Java applet room is much quicker to load than a remote server chat room, which may be overloaded by other chatters.

1. Getting a chat room for the website:

❑   Go to some chat host, such as www.webchatting.com

❑   Click on "Get a chat room for your website"

❑   Copy the code given

❑   Open your homepage in a web editor

❑   Paste the code in the relevant place in the document

❑   Compare the code in the website and in the document, to make sure that it is exactly the same

❑   Save the document

❑   Connect to your server via FTP and upload the page

2. Getting a Java applet chat room for your website:

❑   Go to http://www.jpilot.com, or some other website offering similar programs

❑   Download the Jpilot applet to some directory on the hard disc

❑   Unzip the applet

❑   Open the chat1.htm file in a notepad

❑   Put in your local server names (e.g, in Poland these might be warszawa.irc.pl, poznan.irc.pl, irc.lublin.pl), giving the preferable server as Value 1. Changing server names to some local ones makes the chat faster to work.

❑   Put your own channel names, with the default channel in Value 1

❑   Save the document

❑   Upload the whole directory to your website via FTP

❑   Open the homepage in a web editor

❑   Add a link to the chat.htm file (e.g., http://batory.plo.lublin.pl/~jkrajka/chat4.html)

❑   Save the homepage and upload it to the website

III. Search engine

The teacher might add a search engine to his/her website, so that students while working on the materials included in it can search the Web directly, without the need to move to some other website. It is possible to get the search engine tools to look for words, for images, either in English only or in a number of languages to choose from. This is possible thanks to a number of Web services, such as Altavista, www.altavista.com. In order to get search engine tools for a class website, the teacher needs to follow these simple steps:

- ❑ Go to www.altavista.com
- ❑ Click on tools
- ❑ Click on "Add Altavista Search to your site"
- ❑ Choose the tools that you want by clicking on "I want this one" button under a required type of searching tool
- ❑ Copy the code
- ❑ Open your homepage in a web editor
- ❑ Paste the code in the relevant place in the document
- ❑ Save the document
- ❑ Connect to your server via FTP and upload the page

IV. A dictionary

The final, and probably the most important, feature that the teacher can equip the website in is a dictionary. It is well-known that machine-readable dictionaries facilitate learning a foreign language by providing much faster access to definitions, hyperlinking words in a definition, advanced searching techniques. Therefore, by using computer dictionaries, either on CD-ROM discs or online, students will find it much easier to work on the Web when reading, listening or writing.

The first way of incorporating online dictionaries in Internet-based tasks is to use dictionaries online, such as www.dictionary.com, www.dictionary.cambridge.org, www.m-w.com, www.leksyka.pl. While doing some tasks, students should have two windows of the Internet browser open, with one with the materials to read or write, while the other being the online dictionary. On coming across an unknown word, a student should double-click it to highlight it, then copy it, switch to the dictionary window, paste the word in the dictionary look-up window and press enter to get the definition. This procedure, though easy and not demanding any preparation from the teacher, is not very convenient for students, as it means swtiching between windows and students are distracted from the materials to work on.

Another option is to get a dictionary for the class website, so that there will be a small dictionary look-up window displayed on the site, and in order to look up a word a student should write it in the box and press enter to connect to the dictionary website and get the definition. Thus, this is the procedure for getting a dictionary for the website:

- ❑ Go to www.leksyka.pl (bilingual Polish-English dictionary), http://dictionary.cambridge.org (monolingual)

- ❑ Click on "Wstaw na swoją stronę" (on the right hand side of the Leksyka page) or "Link to us" (in the menu on the left of Cambridge Dictionaries Online)
- ❑ Copy the code given
- ❑ Open your homepage in a web editor
- ❑ Paste the code in the relevant place in the document
- ❑ Save the document
- ❑ Connect to your server via FTP and upload the page

Thanks to doing that, students do not have to go to any other website, because the dictionary can be accessed from the class website. However, using the dictionary still demands being connected to the dictionary website, that is moving from the one being currently in use. Also, it is not too helpful when students work on the Web, moving from one website to another, performing Net searches or doing some research. Thus, some other means of reference is needed to allow students to get dictionary lookup when working anywhere in the Net, which is making a dictionary a part of the Internet browser, so that the dictionary can be accessed at any moment, and the definition is given in the window opened on the left of the browser, just as is the case with History or Favourites. To do that, you need to:

- ❑ Go to some dictionary website, such as Cambridge Dictionary Online (http://dictionary.cambridge.org) or Lookwayup (http://lookwayup.com)
- ❑ Click on "Link to us" (Cambridge) or "Free add a dictionary to your browser" (Lookwayup)
- ❑ Click on the link given in the websites and drag it to the browser
- ❑ To look up a word, click on the link in the browser, then type in a word in the box opened on the left

Finally, the teacher might want to make some of the pages of the class website active dictionary pages, so that doubleclicking any word in a page opens a small lookup window with the definition of the word. The lookup window is opened on top of the original text as a separate window, so students do not move from the original text. This is especially useful when teachers prepare some reading comprehension materials for students to work on in their free time. In order to enable active dictionary pages, teachers/webmasters need to

- ❑ Go to Lookwayup (http://lookwayup.com)
- ❑ Scroll down the page to "Free install it on your page"
- ❑ Click on "Webmasters can enable their site"
- ❑ Copy the code given in the box
- ❑ Open the page to be translated in a web editor

- ❑ Paste the code BEFORE the </HEAD> or the </BODY> tag
- ❑ Save the page
- ❑ Connect to your server via FTP program and upload the page

It is hoped that teachers might find the above instructions useful to make their class websites more comprehensive by providing informative web statistics, fast and easy-to-use chat room, search engine and effective dictionary.