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## **EDITOR'S MESSAGE**

Out of the many streams of Computer-Assisted Language Learning, Internet-based teaching has been to some extent underestimated, with more research interest devoted to Computer-based Multimedia, Computer-Mediated Communication, Corpus-Based Teaching or Computer-Adaptive Testing, to name just a few. The context of the use of the Web as a teaching medium for face-to-face in-class teaching still needs description, investigation and reflection, in order to arrive at sound pedagogical solutions properly integrated with the main curriculum. Thus, this problem, together with some others, is central in the current issue of *Teaching English with Technology, A Journal for Teachers of English*, represented by the majority of publications in the current volume. Quite a strong focus on the applications of the Internet in face-to-face classroom teaching has been one of the concerns of the editorial board of the Journal, and has been exemplified, among others, by the prominence of the Internet Lesson Ideas (formerly Internet Lesson Plans) section.

Thus, starting the discussion of some of the problems of Internet-based teaching, Randall Davis, in the article entitled "Utopia or chaos? The impact of technology on language learning", reflects on the pedagogical use of the Internet in the classroom, starting with a historical perspective on computers and proceeding to practical ideas on improving successful integration of the Internet and language teaching. The author, renowned multimedia content developer, makes interesting openings into the issues of sifting through online content, installing applications and determining learning outcomes. The other article in this issue, "Guidelines for Internet-based teaching" by Christopher Alexander, further explores the area of Internet-based teaching, presenting a research study with the aim of describing and interpreting the key issues ESOL teachers faced over a five-to-seven-month period using the Internet, analysing how and/or why such issues affected teacher awareness of Web-based teaching and determining how these might be addressed. The practical guidelines stemming from the research will surely be of help in designing and implementing Internet-mediated lessons.

On the level of lesson design, Internet-based teaching can be observed in a lesson plan "April Fool's Day" by Katarzyna Szewczyk, where students develop reading comprehension skills in the online environment, with the other aim of acquiring intercultural competence necessary in becoming a successful language learner.

The Internet and ESP section features an article “A corpus-based focus on ESP teaching” by Alejandro Curado Fuentes. The study describes the main results derived from one year of teaching ESP with a focus on electronic corpora, pointing to the observation of positive and negative factors in terms of language acquisition, leading to the planning and design of corpus technology priorities. It is especially interesting to follow the procedures of corpus compilation, course preparation and materials development, sufficiently exemplified by the resources found in the Appendix.

In the On the Web section there are two contributions relating to various EFL resources available online: Maria Teresa Ciaffaroni makes an evaluative review of three EFL portal sites (Dave’s ESL Cafe, LearnEnglish and English-Zone), confronting them with some general criteria, based on SLA principles, and some specific ones, to establish whether they may provide any added value compared to currently published materials. On the other hand, Maria Victoria Fernandez, in her article “More on legal English on the Web”, provides a summary of websites potentially useful for non-native speaker students of English for law.

The final section of the current issue of the Journal, A Word from a Techie, covers two important, yet distinct, areas. One is the phenomenon of texting, or abbreviated form of email and mobile phone communication, which is beginning to gain ground in the language classroom. The issue is addressed by Neil McBeath, who details the process of familiarising English for military purposes learners with e-mail writing and texting. In the other contribution, “Feed my RSS: Using RSS feeds in writing classes”, Stan Bogdanov gives a tutorial into enhancing the writing instruction with Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds, to motivate learners to better quality writing output by enabling a more effective delivery and publishing of online content.

It is hoped that a great diversity of topics and issues covered in the Journal articles will stimulate readers to their personal endeavours with educational technology, resulting in innovative classroom ideas, lesson plans and entire technology-assisted curricula.

I wish you all good reading.

# ARTICLES

## UTOPIA OR CHAOS?:

### THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON LANGUAGE TEACHING

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#### **Introduction**

Over the past several decades, technology has become a fixture in many homes around the world, and its influence has permeated into all facets of our lives, including educational settings. Such penetration has been hailed by many as the wave of the future in which language instruction will be driven by new advances in computers, the Internet, and mobile technologies. However, how we go about integrating technology into our classrooms can have a huge impact on whether a technologically-driven classroom succeeds or fails, even with low-tech solutions.

So, where lies the praise or blame for the success or failure of technology? Will a Utopian view of pedagogically-sound teaching prevail in our classrooms, or will teachers soon abandon high-tech gadgets and return more to traditional materials? Because the use of the Internet has become so widespread, this article will focus attention on that medium, starting with some historical perspective on computers and then suggest a few practical ideas to improving successful integration of the Internet and language teaching.

#### **Identifying the role of technology in education**

For the past several decades, a great deal of debate has raged on about the pedagogical worth of computers in the classroom. On the one hand, computer and software companies often provide mostly anecdotal evidence as to the usefulness of technology in language instruction, stating heightened student motivation and more engaging learning. However, a number of researchers have suggested that while technology has grown leaps and bounds, teachers' use of it often remains very antiquated, limited to

simple writing assignments and Internet searches (Cuban, 2001; MacDonald, 2004; Oppenheimer, 1997, 2003). Some have suggested that this has been due, in part, to educators' limited vision of the role of technology in language instruction. In fact, Garrett (1991, p. 75) pointed this out when she stated that "the use of the computer does not constitute a method" and it is only a "medium in which a variety of methods, approaches, and pedagogical philosophies may be implemented." Although this statement was made a number of years ago, its premise still applies to our learning environments today, especially in light of the fact that there is a growing disparity between technology and effective classroom implementation of it.

In other words, coming to the false conclusion that computers will do things better and faster for us without our intervention is at the center of this issue. Schrum (2000, para 3), an associate professor in the department of instructional technology at the University of Georgia, describes the historical dilemma well:

We're all familiar with the extravagant promises of technology: It will make our students smarter -- and it will do it faster and cheaper than ever before. Moreover, the promise suggests, this miracle will occur almost by osmosis. We need only place a computer in a room, stand back, and watch the magic take place. If only life were that simple and learning that easy!

Those of us who remember the 1980s, when computers were first making their way into our classrooms, probably also remember a great deal of bad software. As educators, we were unfamiliar with the technology and uncertain about its possibilities. So we stepped back and let software developers, hardware vendors, and other technicians define not only what we could buy but also how those products would be used. In many ways, the technology drove the educational process. And guess what? It didn't work very well!

So where does this leave us? Obviously, program administrators need to rethink specific, realistic goals for what the Internet can and cannot do to help students reach curricula objectives, and then actively support teachers in the process through in-service training. As for teachers, we need to think beyond the box and determine, step-by-step, what technology can do for us to support – not supplant – our teaching goals. Fortunately, educators can be very chameleonic with the right tools and training, and can adapt their teaching styles to new situations.

In the field of language education, a great deal of emphasis now focuses on online learning, and it is touted as the great liberator by freeing students and teachers to

accomplish learning in new and exciting ways. Personally, I am sold on the benefits of online teaching and learning from both a pedagogical and technical standpoint (i.e., anywhere, anytime learning, collaboration with worldwide partners, access to native-speaking content, etc.). However, as pointed out earlier, a great deal of the success and failure of any technology rests in sound teaching practices.

Keeping all of this in mind, the next section of this paper will address some basic considerations when working with the Internet in order to maximize learning outcomes.

### **Understanding the Internet**

First, we must understand better how the Internet works ourselves. Although the Internet may appear to be an easy concept to grasp, it can be a very unfriendly jungle out there. In simple terms, the Internet is the telecommunication and computer systems that are linked together, just like a great complex water system. Some of it is new, with big wide robust pipes (high-speed connections); other parts are obsolete, narrow, and even leaking. Some pipes can handle a large volume of water; others are clogged, and flowing through this pipe system is the content – the files (documents, audio files, graphics, etc.) – that are being requested around the globe. Such a scenario can result in Internet congestion, and going online might be just as rewarding as sucking molasses through a thin straw.

At that point, Internet “rage” sets in, and students (after waiting an astronomically-long 2 seconds) click the stop button in their browser and complain to the teacher that the site does not work. Falconer, a psychologist at Dundee University, has suggested that “feelings of stress and frustration arise when the gap between our expectations and actual experience on the internet is ever widening” (as cited in *BBC News*, 2004, para 8). The phenomenon is indicative of the world we live as pointed out by Telewest (2002, para 3):

With our growing 'needed-to-be-done-yesterday' attitude, patience is no longer a virtue when it comes to getting what we want in a hurry. It was our addiction to living high-speed lifestyles that sparked the onslaught of road-rage and air-rage, but it is today's widespread desire for a life on the internet fast-lane . . .

The end result of these experiences is that teachers and students often remove websites from study lists, when in fact the sites might work just fine. At the same time, there are times when a website really might not be working (e.g., the site is undergoing maintenance, the website owner has closed the site, etc.). Just remember that there are many factors that affect our ability to use the Internet.

### **Sifting through Internet content**

Now, it is time to make the plunge into the somewhat murky and complex world of the Internet. This online playground is home to an extremely vast collection of information, but sifting through it effectively is a more challenging task than we lead students to believe. In fact, just telling students to go to the Internet to search for something is akin to, as several authors put it, “trying to get a drink of water from a gushing fire hydrant” (Warschauer, Shetzer, & Meloni, 2000, p. 85). In other words, the Internet is an almost measureless repository of great content, but it also contains an equal amount of junk, and sifting through this large collection can be daunting. Unfortunately, students latch on to whatever first appears on their screens, whether it is accurate or not.

This is often a quandary for teachers who realize that they need to help students learn to critically examine information on the Internet in terms of credibility, authority, citation, timeliness, and accuracy. Back in the days before the Internet, students’ main ally was the library, and searching through volumes on the shelves was just the norm. Unfortunately, because of the free and mostly-unadjudicated nature of the Internet, anyone can self-publish without being held to a high standard of professionalism. Furthermore, students these days have been raised in an online world, and thus, they often do not realize what careful research is all about. With the complex and daunting prospect of analyzing so much content, students tend to gravitate to what is easiest irrespective of quality. With all these challenges, teachers should bare the responsibility of helping students combine both the massive and easily-accessible Internet with conventional research techniques.

### **Installing needed Internet applications**

Besides the issues of questionable authority with online content, Internet users need to be aware that some websites require special additional software (e.g., media players) to be installed to access certain files including audio and video. Having developed multimedia websites since 1997, I cannot count the number of times I have received



terse messages from visitors, simply stating: “I can’t hear audio.” Nothing more. No further elaboration. That is it. Therefore, identifying the issue is very problematic, and both website developers and teachers who introduce these sites share the responsibility for educating students.

First, from a developer’s standpoint, instructions on the site should be very clear in terms of letting visitors know what they need to do to listen to or watch the online content. Having an Audio Help page or information for first-time visitors can be extremely important. Furthermore, you should identify your audience and determine the market penetration of the file format you are planning to use (e.g., RealMedia, Windows Media, QuickTime, etc.). In other words, you would not want to use a media format that only ten percent of the world can play unless you only were trying to reach that narrow niche. At the same time, teachers equally shoulder the responsibility for verifying whether their computer labs have such media players installed and if their students can easily download and install the player on their home computers if needed. You will always see a mixed bag of results without teachers’ active involvement.

### **Determining learning outcomes**

Even if students have background knowledge on the Internet with the needed applications installed on their computers, they still need guidance on the learning objectives and outcomes for online content. As suggested in Schrum’s quote earlier in this paper, some administrators and teachers unfortunately presume that learning with computers will “occur almost by osmosis,” and I have witnessed this firsthand in my visits to labs in a number of countries around the world. In the end, without specific pedagogical practices driving the use of technology, computers are often relegated to a secondary or non-existent role and are often abandoned. At that point, debate ensues on the side of administrators and teachers as to why the lab has failed. However, Warschauer (1996) pinpointed both the cause and the solution that is still very much applicable:

As with the audio language lab 'revolution' of 40 years ago, those who expect to get magnificent results simply from the purchase of expensive and elaborate systems will likely be disappointed. But those who put computer technology to use in the service of good pedagogy will undoubtedly find ways to enrich their educational program and the learning opportunities of their students

Thus, with reference to the use of the Internet, rather than allowing technology to drive classroom instruction, teachers must clearly identify specific objectives, procedures, and assessment techniques for using online resources. As with all good teaching, teachers must develop a plan of action for using the Internet. We cannot send our students off without specific goals in mind, training on how to use the sites, procedures on how to accomplish the tasks, and an explanation on how students will be evaluated for the activity.

### **Testing websites yourself**

Many teachers lament dissatisfaction with the Internet (and computers in general) in such a way that you might conclude that having technical problems is an inherent part of technology. However, most frustration from using technology does not come from the technology itself, but from inadequate training on how to use it. Too often, teachers tell students to visit a website without confirming its objectives, checking instructions on how to navigate it, determining whether the site performs equally well for all browsers, computer platforms, and Internet connection speeds, and reviewing whether students need additional applications or plug-ins to use the online content. Never assume that just because the site works well in your university's computer lab with a high speed connection, students will have the same experience from a dialup connection on their computer at home.

### **Conclusion**

Without a doubt, technology has revolutionized society in many places around the globe, including how language instruction is taught and delivered. In particular, the Internet has become a conduit where people can learn, share, and collaborate in ways not possible years before. However, a great deal of the success comes from preparing students to interact and learn in this online environment. Never make the assumption that students know what they are doing because there is a huge difference between computer know-how and critical thinking, particularly when it comes to academic research that some of our students need.

Finally, for all our great technological advances, teachers still risk reducing their use of computers to simple tasks that do not maximize its pedagogical potential, particularly with regards to the Internet. In other words, we should ask ourselves if it is possible to extend our normal teaching far beyond simple, monotonous tasks at the

computer. That is not to say that elements of past methods that cannot or should not be adopted. In fact, many learning tasks can be accomplished with simple chalk, a blackboard, and a tape recorder. However, although teaching and language-learning theory has evolved during the past 50 years or so, our ability to adapt our teaching styles in line with new technologies has not progressed as quickly. If teachers focus on simple basic ideas as presented in this article, our new, refocused approach to teaching will propel us a long way to making technology and the Internet a more rewarding partner in the teaching and learning process.

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# **GUIDELINES FOR INTERNET-BASED TEACHING**

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## **Abstract**

This paper presents clear pedagogical guidelines for using the Internet in TESOL by drawing on the key findings of a case study carried out in 2004-5 at Intercollege (<http://www.intercollege.ac.cy/>) Nicosia, Cyprus. The case study described how ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teachers endeavoured to utilize the Internet in their language classes in an ICT (Information and Communications Technology) language laboratory.

## **1. Introduction**

In this paper I will discuss some key background literature on the Internet (section 2) and outline the methods' orientation of this case-study research (section 3). A sample of teacher interview data in section 4 provides evidence of the way teacher attitudes changed negatively during the study. In section 5 I assert that lack of sound pedagogy was the principal reason why teachers' attitudes changed and in section 6 I provide some practical pedagogical guidelines for teachers wishing to use the Internet. Examples of how these guidelines might be operationalised are presented in section 7.

## **2. Background literature**

The Internet being mainly a free resource is increasingly being used in TESOL, and the exponential growth of ESOL websites is, I suppose, a testament to how important the Internet has become. Yet realising the potential of this exciting and constantly expanding medium is not a straightforward undertaking.

There seems to be disagreement in the literature regarding the effectiveness of the Internet. Appertaining to the effectiveness of the Internet, a lot of contemporary Internet-germane literature appears to be advancing the claim that Internet-use is advantageous for learning. Frey (2002: 1-4) for instance states that the Internet is awash

with activities that offer many new ways of teaching and learning, and asserts that even the most Luddite of university scholars now realise the potential applications of technology. By means of illustration Morrison (2002: 1-7) holds that the wealth of information available on the Web affords teachers and learners access to language learning resources like never before. John de Szendeffy (1998: 1-4) holds the belief that “no matter what you think of the World Wide Web as a teaching resource, it will play a grand role in the education of your students”.

There is, however, a growing research consensus that appears somewhat *sceptical* apropos Internet classroom usage. Warschauer (2003: 1-2) has the opinion that the introduction of computers, “the flashy or gleaming new machine in the classroom”, and the Internet in the eyes of its supporters has represented the pinnacle of modernity yet the bold promises made by its proponents were very often followed by erratic and disappointing diffusion. In addition, Warschauer (2003: 1-2) holds the belief that there has certainly been no shortage of bold claims about how computers will revolutionise the classroom, transforming the teacher from the stereotypic *cliché*, “sage on the stage” to the new and equally hackneyed “guide on the side”. Moreover Warschauer (2003: 1-2) asserts that there is a ‘belief’ that learners will become ‘autonomous’ and ‘goal-directed’, classrooms will become centres of “collaborative and critical” inquiry, and technology will have finally transformed schools to match the needs of the information society.

A lot of Internet-relevant literature also asserts that there is lack of sound Internet pedagogy (the word appears to be used in a *method-of-teaching* sense). Wood (1999: 1) for instance, provides an overview of Internet sites that could be helpful in the ESOL classroom. He deems that a preponderance pedagogical books, articles, and ‘exhortations’ about the educational significance of the Internet often turn out to be little more than lengthy lists of Web page addresses (URLs). It is held by Wood (1999: 1) that “what is often missing from the huge array of Internet materials for pedagogic purposes is any clear identification of the new pedagogical opportunities that the Internet offers”. Wood, in my opinion, appears to be bringing forward the idea that there is a lack of advice on how to use such Internet sites. Kuechler (1996) and LeLoup and Ponterio (2000), however, appear to be postulating that teachers using the Web have to make use of their skills/knowledge. The implication being that this is demanding and may not necessarily lead to higher levels of learning and teaching. Kuechler (1996) holds that “the use of modern information technology in college teaching should be

driven by the pedagogical imagination of the instructor” and that “more toys (more sophisticated hardware) will not necessarily make better classes”. LeLoup and Ponterio (2000: 5-6) hold that ultimately it is incumbent upon foreign language teachers to integrate the Internet into the curriculum in a pedagogically sound and meaningful way.

### **3. About the case study**

The global research aim of the case study was to describe and interpret the key issues six Intercollege ESOL teachers faced over a five-to-seven-month period using the Internet. The global research aim also had two associated strands: firstly, to analyse how and/or why such issues affected teacher awareness of using the Internet and secondly, to determine how such issues might be addressed. In this research it was the teacher who was the focus of the study, and the purpose was to analyse qualitatively through semi-structured interviews carried out at one-to-two-month intervals how teacher awareness changed. Other data were also used to inform teacher interviews; these data were derived from a student questionnaire, follow-up structured student interviews, a teacher-student classroom observation, a semi-structured interview with the Head of the Languages Department and sample of teachers’ Internet lessons. As this research was a case study within an interpretative paradigm, it was held that the research paradigm would suggest discovering and interpreting the personal stories.

The issues that were addressed in the data analysis were grounded in the research data. Data were collected comprehensively with an open mind, and as the study progressed data were continually examined for patterns. Key themes were ascertained from the data first and then a link was established, if possible, with issues discussed in the literature. Moreover, no assumption was made that data would pertain conveniently to one issue; rather, it was held that some data might correlate to several issues. In order to identify key hypotheses to be analysed further, an analysis of how teacher opinion changed during the interview period was undertaken. A key theme that emerged during the study and discernible in all the data was teachers becoming increasingly *alive* to the implications of certain drawbacks of Internet-ESOL lab use. Teachers in their first interview had initially appeared mainly positive about Internet use, however as interviews progressed they seemed to have more jaundiced attitudes. Initial teacher enthusiasm about using the Internet resonated with literature on the attractions of Internet as a teaching resource, as exemplified in, Frey (2002: 1-4), Morrison (2002 1-7). Yet, the heightened teacher awareness regarding perceived drawbacks of using the

Internet in subsequent interviews (i.e. attitudinal changes) applied to literature on scepticism about Internet use e.g. Warschauer (2003: 1-2).

#### **4. Sample of interview data**

The data sample below provides an example of teacher attitudinal change. The transcript code below comprises three parts: (1) interviewee teacher number (T1 to T6); (2) semi-structured interview number (1 to 4); (3) interview question number (numbers ranged from 1 to 30). The italics followed by a transcript code are the actual words used by the teacher.

##### **4.1. Teacher one sample data**

The way negative student comments about lab-lessons presented in the account below had changed T1's ostensibly enthusiastic initial outlook to a more critical and less animated stance, point to what T1 had been doing in the lab (i.e. her Internet lesson pedagogy) may have militated against her students' language-learning expectations. This hypothesis resonates with Laurillard (2002: 202). Asserted lack of appreciation from students for the time T1 had put into preparing lessons also may have raised critical awareness.

In her first interview, which was undertaken a few weeks after using the lab for the first time, T1 seemed to be 'ablaze' with enthusiasm about using the Internet. For instance, she stated that she had felt the lab was a *very good alternative to traditional face-to-face teaching, especially at the end of the semester* (T1/1/06). She held that she *loves using the lab* (T1/1/09) and said that she was *very excited about using it* (T1/1/09). She 'pontificated' that *the variety of Internet exercises available can help to address students' different learning styles* (T1/1/10) and that her students *enjoyed using the lab* (T1/1/12). Moreover, she seemed to be 'selling out' as a 'traditional' ESOL teacher when she deliberated over the benefits of using the lab in comparison to the then 'seemingly passé' non-ICT classroom. For example she expressed the view that: *instead of me giving the exercises out, the Web sites do it. They are given the answers. It builds up autonomous learning; they don't need the teacher. We teachers are so vain we want to be the ones that transmit knowledge* (T1/1/11-13). She also mentioned using the Internet helped her to teach her students language and computer skills i.e. *things that they are going to use for the rest of their lives* (T1/1/08). However, approximately two months later in interview 2, there was a feeling that the 'novelty factor' might have been

'wearing off' and that her students had appeared critical of Internet lesson materials i.e. she changed tact: *The first time it was exciting for them, now some of them say that they feel the teacher is lazy because they are doing the work and the teacher sits and monitors them, they don't realise that I have spent three to four hours preparing the lesson* (T1/02/07).

In interview 3, about two months after interview 2, there was more qualitative negative feedback. This was epitomised in T1's third interview i.e. when asked what kind of feedback she had been getting from her students regarding her lessons, she responded: *Some of my students are especially outspoken, they feel it's a waste of time* (T1/3/01). By interview 4 (i.e. carried out about one month after interview 3), T1 stated, with regard to the twenty percent of students who stated in the questionnaire that they had liked using the Internet a little or not at all, that: *maybe they don't like using the computer for language learning, it's a huge percentage, so it would affect me, I would tend to use it less* (T1/4/02).

## **5. What caused raised awareness of the drawbacks of Internet?**

Teachers' Internet lessons and observation data provided a precious data source that enabled me to assert that pedagogical development lies at the heart of Internet use. In this context it implies incorporating elements of traditional non-ICT and ICT teaching i.e. using the Internet as a 'tool' for learning. Moreover it is my interpretation that teachers' inability to use more appropriate Internet pedagogy was the most likely cause of teacher perceived student rejection, teacher hesitancy regarding being able to measure student improvement and teacher raised awareness of the drawbacks of Internet usage.

## **6. Discussion**

Below I present some hands-on practical guidelines derived from the case study for teachers wishing to use the Internet (possibly in an ICT language lab) and then give some lesson examples of how these guidelines could be observed.

### **6.1. Have clear lesson aims and then look for suitable sites: *don't get caught in the Web***



Have aims that are perspicuously reflected in lesson materials; not stating lesson aims might be confusing for students. Even though, this may, at first sight appear obvious advice to any teacher, teachers preparing Internet lessons may lose sight of this seemingly fundamental TESOL lesson-planning principle. This could be a consequence and drawback of using the Internet. Also, consider to what degree your lesson aims determine the sites chosen and to what extent lesson sites have determined lesson aims. With regard to the latter, a weakness of this approach is that unsuitable sites may be used as a basis for determining lesson aims and teachers may lose sight of how to inextricably link sites to course content.

**6.2. Explain to students how their Internet lesson will relate to their course in general: *don't lose sight of this fundamental TESOL principle***

Teachers should tangibly relate Internet lesson materials to college exams/tests; in this way teachers might be more able to measure attainment. This guideline is particularly important if teachers intend to use the Internet regularly. A possible outcome of not perceiving a higher rate of language acquisition is it increases teachers' awareness of the drawbacks of using the ESOL Internet. Moreover, students may want to see a clear connection between what they do in their Internet lessons and on what they will be tested. Also, relate the Internet lesson to the course in general. Windeatt *et al.* (2002: 11) for instance hold, with regard to post-Internet-lesson-lab work, that 'anything done in the computer room should be transferable back to the normal classroom'. Moreover, Windeatt *et al.* maintain (2002: 11) that students should have something physical to take away with them so that they have a record for follow-up work or end-of-course revision. Students therefore may need hard-copy lesson handouts as well as electronic-version handouts to accompany their Internet use.

**6.3. Use technology to reinforce existing practice: *students want a teacher to teach them, they don't want a guide on the side***

Technology should be used in a way that reinforces existing non-ICT practice i.e. the teacher should remain *the teacher* and not become just *the facilitator*. Moreover, why should teachers relinquish their age-old role? Internet lessons that have the highest potential for learning are probably where teachers have a planned amalgam of non-ICT and ICT roles, and students have timed chunks of autonomous ICT study. The content of the non-ICT part of the lesson should relate clearly to the ICT part. Introducing

autonomous learning without addressing the learning experience and expectations of students may lead to a degree of student resistance i.e. students may expect to be taught traditionally, and so may not identify with being *autonomous* learners. Furthermore, relying wholly on interactive, self-correcting ESOL Internet activities may lead to a compromise of teachers' control/regulation of the lesson i.e. maybe students expect to be controlled/monitored by the teacher and not the Internet.

Another argument for combining traditional with ICT, is the possibility of unreliable Internet connection i.e. this may rationalise the need to incorporate non-ICT elements in lessons. If there is no or very slow Internet (site) connection, the teacher would not have to cancel the lesson, she could concentrate on the non-ICT lesson elements. Finally, a lot of ESOL Internet activities seem to be narrowing the foreign language curriculum to mainly grammar and vocabulary practice. However, the main drive of non-Internet related foreign language curricula is to broaden the scope of activity by engaging with communication and intercultural learning. This was a strong argument to consider combining ICT and non-ICT teaching. Combining ICT with non-ICT is in accord with Albaugh (1997 stated in Jones 2004: 17) who attaches weight to teachers tending to "adopt a new technology when that technology helps them to do what they are currently doing better".

#### **6.4. Choose suitable sites level-wise and topic-wise: *if you're not critical of the site content, your students will be critical***

Finding suitable course-relevant Internet lesson sites can be a difficult undertaking. Godwin-Jones (1999: 12-16) for instance holds the opinion that a troublesome issue with Internet-use is locating desirable websites that are appropriate in terms of language level, media format, interest and reliable information. Furthermore, it will be very time consuming to search/choose suitable lesson sites and prepare lesson handouts in Word or PowerPoint format. Teachers should always pre-screen sites sufficiently well to prepare pro-actively for student questions, and if necessary teach something. This also suggests that teachers should not relinquish their traditional *deliverer-of-content* role. Unfortunately, there seems to be a lack of ESOL-publisher editorial support i.e. there is a dearth of appropriately pre-screened textbook-complementary ESOL-Internet exercises. Also, try to find sites with comparable vocabulary to which the students have been exposed in their non-ICT classes. One drawback of some interactive sites is that students may not be doing them properly e.g. students can find the answer to sites

without reading anything. Windeatt *et al.* (2000: 10) state referring to Internet usage, that in some cases, before beginning an activity on the computer, it will be necessary to pre-teach vocabulary, or a specific function or structure. Long lists of ESOL resources do not seem to help teachers much. This suggests that teachers require more than just categorised hand-picked Internet lists or lists of well-known ESOL homepages; teachers need effective pedagogical guidance on how to use the Internet materials.

#### **6.5. How many sites should an Internet lesson have? How much time should a student spend on each site? *Find the balance***

Timing and sequencing of Internet-site materials is an important and complex lesson-planning issue.

- Do not rely on one lesson site just in case it does not work; use several reliable sites.
- Do not use too many sites; this encourages students to rush through the sites working less conscientiously. Having fewer sites and more teacher interaction (i.e. more non-ICT teaching) might lead to better teacher control over the regulation of learning.
- Beware of ELT-game sites; students will be drawn to game sites when they should be doing other tasks.
- Have a set of core Internet exercises for weaker students and additional exercises for students that finish earlier. Even though teachers have to devise ways of dealing with less able students in the non-ICT classroom, teachers may need more time to pre-screen and organise Internet materials so as to know which sites should be core for all students to cover, and which ones ought to be additional for more able students.

#### **7. Practical application of guidelines**

Sharing teacher lesson materials may be an efficacious way to reduce long-term training and support; in accord with Boshuizen and Wopereis (2003, 149), Potter and Mellar (2000, 35), Coles *et al.* (2000, 173). This also suggests that an *ancillary* role of a lab-coordinator should embrace monitoring teacher innovation and circulating effectual lesson plans to other teachers. Therefore an innovative example of how the above guidelines might be operationalised is available on

<http://www.englishlab.intercol.edu/internetlessons/> (click 'an example of sound Internet pedagogy'). Seven Internet lessons are also available on the site below NB these lessons are suitable for approximately beginner to lower-intermediate level. These lessons were written by Katarzyna Rysiewicz from Intercollege (<http://www.englishlab.intercol.edu/internetlessons/>).

## Conclusion

As our understanding of how to use the Internet gets better, and more research findings are disseminated, the way we use it will improve. Internet use therefore may lead to enhanced learning, and this would fundamentally rationalise its use and future development. Moreover, it is doubtful that the use of the Internet in TESOL will be a 'passing fad': it is highly likely that *things will get better* i.e. technology use will improve as technological innovations worldwide are made. This would necessitate and vindicate a more committed approach from schools or colleges who may not be able to achieve learning/financial targets without it.

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# INTERNET LESSON IDEAS

## April Fool's Day

by **Katarzyna Szewczyk**

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imaginationby @ yahoo.com

**Level:** lower-intermediate

**Time:** 80 mins

**Aims:**

1. skimming and scanning the new text
2. working on vocabulary connected with the topic of the lesson
3. writing the creative essay

**Resources/materials:** the clown's picture on separate sheets of paper for every 2 Ss (if necessary – printed simplified text), chart, computers with the Internet access and Web browser.

**Possible problems:** Ss may have problems with understanding the text (propose to use an Internet glossary or dictionary such as <http://education.yahoo.com/reference/dictionary/>).

**Preparation:**

The teacher should check the Internet site before the lesson and write all the links on a blackboard. If the text is too difficult for Ss it is possible to simplify it and print the text with necessary changes.

**I. Introduction (20 mins):**

1. Divide the class into pairs and give them the sheets of paper with the clown's picture. Ask them to think about the holiday it is symbolizing. Write all the variants on a blackboard and ask for arguments.

2. When the proper answer is given (April Fool's Day) ask Ss to recollect any funny April Fool's trick they have experienced. Tell them to describe it - funny, interesting, cruel, boring, unexpected, unusual and so on. What was their reaction to it?
3. Ask Ss to put down some facts about the origin of the April Fool's Day on a sheet of paper if they know any (5-6 sentences).

**II. Internet work (45 min):**

1. Ask Ss to go to the following site <http://homeschooling.about.com/cs/unitssubjhol/a/aprilfools.htm> and read the text (*Learn all about the history of April Fool's Day*), using the Internet dictionaries to help if they find any unknown words.
2. After reading the text ask Ss to go to <http://homeschooling.about.com/cs/hisholidays/l/blquizholapfool.htm> and do the quiz without using the text. If they make a mistake, advise them to return to the text and try to find a right answer.
3. Once they have finished the quiz, ask Ss to work in pairs, look through the text again and find similarities and differences in the ways of celebrating April Fool's Day in France, America and Belarus. Propose Ss to put the facts in a chart and discuss the results.

	<b>France and America</b>	<b>France and Belarus</b>	<b>Belarus and America</b>
<i>Similarities</i>			
<i>Differences</i>			

**III. Post-Internet work (15 min):**

Ask Ss to compare the facts about the April Fool's Day they have put down and the facts they have learnt from the text. Did they learn anything new? Encourage them to use some additional links about the April Fool's Day if they got interested in this topic (<http://inventors.about.com/library/inventors/blaprilfools.htm/.31>, <http://italian.about.com/library/weekly/aa032801a.htm>). Tell them that these links can help them in preparing their homework.

**Homework:**

Ask Ss to compose an essay about the traditional way of celebrating April Fool's Day in their country and make a small vocabulary of the new words they have learnt.



Note: the clown's picture that could be used.



# **THE INTERNET AND ESP**

## **A CORPUS-BASED FOCUS ON ESP TEACHING**

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### **Abstract**

The conjunction of lexical analysis and information technology has often led to the design of specialized material. In my Computer and Business English courses at tertiary level, this scope has enabled a certain degree of experimentation with corpus-based lexical information. This paper describes the main results derived from one year of teaching ESP with a focus on electronic corpora. The main conclusions point to the observation of positive and negative factors in terms of language acquisition, leading to the planning and design of corpus technology priorities.

### **Introduction**

The need to communicate in specialized contexts or domains, such as academic and scientific disciplines at university, is greatly emphasized at the European level. The emphasis is often placed on an effective linguistic development for research purposes (Bricall report, 2000). In addition, as electronic communication and the digital era expand, it is obvious that new lines of work open up for linguists and foreign language researchers (e.g., study of cyber-genres, sociolinguistic analysis of web sites, etc). An example is Giménez (2000), analyzing professional communication and use of e-mail; another one is Pérez Paredes (2001), who underscores the need to integrate real situations derived from Internet use, or Posteguillo (2002), who distinguishes a double focus in the study of network discourse: that of computational linguistics and sociolinguistics. The new venues and scopes suggested for ESP (English for Specific Purposes) point to the importance of conveniently valuing and assessing the development of specialized languages in new and relevant areas (e.g., working with technology).

This paper focuses on academic language for university disciplines like Computer Science and Business Administration as a common area, not as separate

fields for lexicographical study (e.g., Collin et al, 2004). Such a holistic approach takes the current key language of subjects shared by the two disciplines and derived from digital resources on economic, financial, technological, socio-technical, and informational topics in Business and Information Technology (BIT). The aim in this sense is academic and research-based; the material collected and designed varies from textbooks to most specialized sources in the form of digital journal articles and research projects.

By handling and contrasting different university syllabi and curricula, a significant conceptual nexus can unfold. In addition, similar topics and interests are revealed in the management of Internet-based databases for such seemingly divergent fields as Business and Computer Science. All this processing of academic goals and contents in the study programs is especially attractive for the analysis of Academic and Technical English at university. Thus, the main objective is to identify interdisciplinary grounds for the exploitation of common lexical cores. In the process of searching, as mentioned, the lessons and lines of work established in the different subject syllabi at university are followed, determining the inclusion of the various texts. Similar to Coxhead (1998), the chief lexical scope integrates constructions found across different academic and scientific texts, following previous classifications made of semi-technical and technical words (Curado, 2001). However, in this case, the purpose is not to build different word sets, but quite the opposite: to form a glossary of useful specific expressions for their detailed application to ESP courses. In fact, lexical variation is not accounted for, and, in contrast, the focus is made on linguistic blocks made up of frequent and dispersed expressions found evenly across a corpus. In this regard, special attention is paid to corpus-based lexical frequency, dispersion, concordance, collocational strength, and lexical behavior (Ooi, 1998). Such factors are essentially instruments for the evaluation of word formations in relation to electronic text typology and corpus sources.

This study includes a lexicographical approach by providing the undergraduate university students with a glossary of key academic constructions that should motivate their decoding and encoding skills. The common objective is to offer a framework for activity and task exploitation often dealing with corpus technology (e.g., identifying key repetitions, formulating semantic prosody, finding best equivalents in Spanish, etc). In the following section, a brief description of the corpus is included, from which the most common 500 words are retrieved for the courses. Then, the integration of the

glossary framework in the ESP curriculum is described and evaluated within the teaching context. Finally, conclusions based on the results obtained during one year of classroom observation are reviewed.

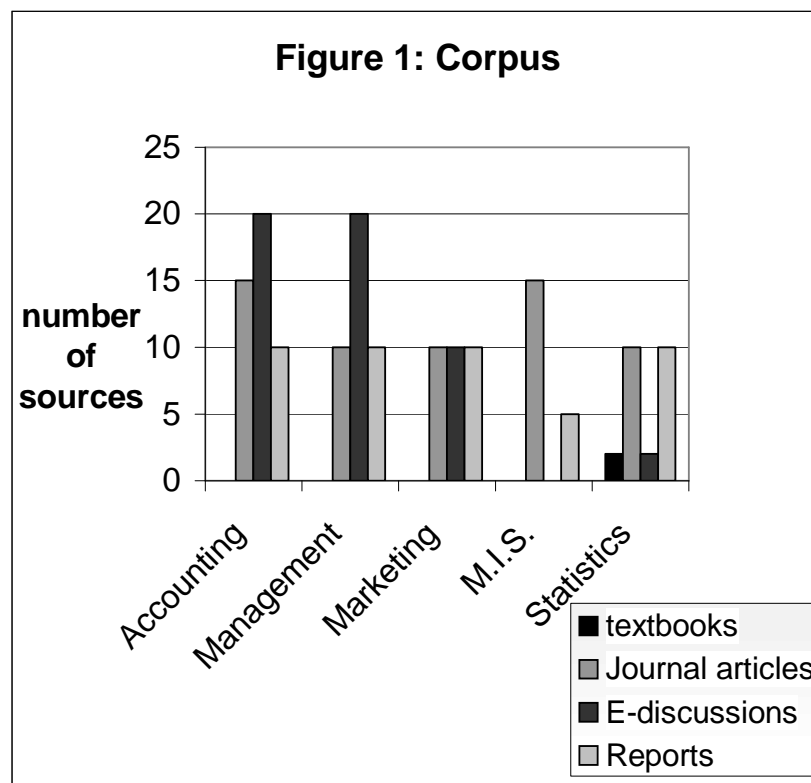
### **The corpus-based glossary**

The factor of 'representativeness' (Biber et al., 1998, p. 246) leads to the design of a glossary based on characteristic data of the domain / area to be represented, Business and Information Technology (BIT). The electronic sources to be selected and edited must adapt to the objectives of the teaching situation. In Business English, for instance, the low-intermediate level of English that students tend to search for clear equivalents in English and Spanish as well as clarity of concepts (e.g., management software for analyzing sales data, on-line tax software for businesses, etc). In Computer English, in turn, the tendency to have both a higher language level and greater technical knowledge encourages the inclusion of more complex text types and topics.

Actually, most glossary resources dealing with technical English (i.e., Computer and Business) available either freely (on the web) or commercially, do not seem to suit these learners' heterogeneous characterization (i.e., in terms of language level and subject knowledge). For instance, in relation to linguistic concerns, core lexical items consisting of content and grammatical words (e.g., *information available on + electronic medium*) tend to be excluded from the resources, whereas, regarding subject matter, the glossaries examined do not give enough lexical information (e.g., <http://www.globalbusinessresources.net/spanish.shtml>), or are too specific (e.g., <http://money.cnn.com/services/glossary/a.html>); most only deal with one discipline (e.g., Collin, Piqué-Angordans, Posteguillo & Melcion, 2004). Thus, the aforementioned need of 'representativeness' leads to the development of a specific resource for the target setting.

In order to attempt to cater for such different needs in the learning context, a balance of textual material should be intended in the corpus. This balance implies the follow-up of objective criteria for the selection of sources in the corpus. In terms of language command, common core lexical knowledge is accounted for. In terms of subject matter, both business and information technology issues are explored. Thus, a concrete number of academic and technical lexical items should be balanced (i.e., a lexical bulk that is neither too large nor stays at a basic level of linguistic / conceptual knowledge).

In addition, as Hunston (2002, p. 16) observes, the selection of sources should reflect the communicative exchanges that take place in the target context of research and work. In the same corpus, we may have from formal writing (e.g., technical reports and instruction manuals) to informal / conversational material on the web (e.g., Internet forum messages). Learning practices and perspectives can benefit from this hybrid nature of the collection (Conrad, 1996, p. 302) and academic text heterogeneity (Swales, 2003, p. 4). Figure 1 displays the contents of the corpus, including different types of readings as well as subjects shared by Business and Computer Science students from the first to the fourth year of study.



The types of texts in the corpus correspond to three different levels of complexity for the learning situation. The textbook is placed in the first category of introductory and informative types, in agreement with Johns (1997, p. 46). At a middle plane, we have reports and e-discussions (i.e., electronic sets of messages in academic forums), also categorized as descriptive types by Henry (2000). At the third (higher) stadium, we identify journal articles discussing research results and thus presenting a more specialized academic discourse type (Conrad, 1996). In relation to subject matter, as

can be checked in Figure 1, five main subjects are explored, seen by students along their respective majors (albeit in different years – e.g., Computer Science people learning Statistics in third year, and Business students in first and second years). Contrary to being an inconvenience, such slight variations can contribute to the inclusion of different genres and text types for each separate subject.

To select the various sources, advises from co-workers and graduate students can orientate our search. Some items, such as Díaz Martín, Veloso & Rodríguez García (1999), written by colleagues in Computer Science, were pertinent, accessible via the professors' websites (at University of Extremadura, the Moodle platform <http://campusvirtual.unex.es>). Also, electronic databases allows for the identification and classification of the types of texts sought. One example is the Kluwer engine for academic material related to BIT ([www.kluweronline.com](http://www.kluweronline.com)) and the site 'Global Edge' for electronic files and digital forums ([www.globaledge.com](http://www.globaledge.com) / <http://globaledge.msu.edu/index.asp>), where the corpus designer may examine documents by topic and text type.

These corpus sources in Figure 1 were selected and stored in the year 2000. As a result, many are no longer available on the Web or electronically (only as electronic corpus sources in University of Extremadura Moodle platform mentioned above). In these sources, the textual and visual elements that do not contribute significant lexical information were discarded. For instance, in the e-discussions, retrieved from an academic forum on the web site 'Global Edge', such items as addressers, addressees, and proper names (e.g., university, cities, etc) were omitted. Thus, only plain text is compiled, at times with just a few lines per message, as in this e-discussion example for the topic of Accounting:

I'm trying to figure out how you compute the distance to the origin, and the contributions of the rows and the cols in the correspondence analysis. Anyone knows how you exactly do that ? I'm trying to reproduce the results of a page I found at this address: ( ) Any help would be greatly appreciated.
--

Other e-discussion messages were as long as 700-800 words. A key factor in the corpus distribution and design was to keep in mind the need for balance during text retrieval and the compilation of the corpus. This meant that, in the overall corpus design, a similar number of words (ranging between 30,000 and 45,000 words) should be met for each subject category displayed in Figure 1 (e.g., from 32,265 words in M.I.S. to

48,340 in Statistics). This distribution is done so that no particular group of texts in one subject, when fed into the wordlist tool of the concordance software (*WordSmith Tools*, Scott, 2000), may yield a much lower or higher amount of words than the rest. The DCL (Detailed Consistency List) that takes the five subject-driven wordlists and contrasts items in them should, in fact, contain similar numerical data for lexical analysis.

The lexical analysis is performed by following the DCL for the whole BIT corpus. As a result, the main goal is to display the top items that most frequently co-occur across the subject categories. The lexical core would represent the highest degree of general or common academic items shared by the two disciplines.

The academic elements, regarded as semi-technical in many cases (e.g., Thurstun and Candlin, 1998; Nation, 2001) tend to contain a significant semantic basis. The total amount of such items should be around 500 node words – a basic-to-intermediate lexical knowledge to be expected for our learning context. To obtain this estimate, the total number of words or tokens in the corpus (652,034) is divided into the total number of types (distinct words in the corpus – 21,963). The result is then multiplied by the standardized token-to-type ratio established by Scott (2000): the number of distinct types per 1000 tokens (i.e., 37.12 in the corpus). The resulting figure is then divided in half due to the need to adapt to a *medium* level of learning (i.e., intermediate; should it have been lower, the amount would have been divided into three, whereas for a high or high/intermediate level, the core academic vocabulary should be the whole figure, about 1000 words according to this computation). The result (551) is rounded up as the amount mentioned above. Some scholars (e.g., Nation, 2001; Flowerdew, 2001) also describe concrete lexical amounts according to such different language commands.

The 500 words selected are listed in the detailed consistency list, which specifies word repetition according to each of the five subjects of the corpus. By examining high frequency and dispersion of the items on the list, common use of such elements in the corpus is made a primary factor. An example is the use of the verb **lead** as a common core word (in agreement with other academic lists – e.g., Coxhead, 1998), since it appears in all five subjects; however, a synonym like the verb **cause**, also considered common core academic by Coxhead (1998), would not be included in our case, since it does not appear in all five categories made.

The corpus-based 500-word glossary is organized by listing key word combinations and expressions found across various text categories. The arrangement of the collocational items is based on frequency and dispersion by using their t-score, which indicates that the given combination is not due to chance. This statistical score should be above required measurements (see, for instance, Church, Gale, Hanks & Hindle, 1991) to consider the lexical elements as common core. For instance, to take the same example as above, the verb *lead to* combines with the adjectives *better*, *improved*, *greater*, and *different*. In all cases, given their co-occurrence frequencies, the resulting t-scores are higher than 2 (minimum required). As a result, in the entry for the verb *lead*, the glossary should contain different examples of constructions found with those adjectives (e.g., *lead to a better environment*, *lead to a greater understanding*, etc). In contrast, a combination like *lead to + higher* appears with a t-score below the minimum value. Thus, the phrase *can lead to a higher turnover* would be discarded for the glossary. The same thing applies to collocates preceding the node word: for instance, *expected to lead to* is included (t-score above 2.0), while other forms like *necessarily lead to* and *automatically lead to* are excluded (t-scores below 2).

### **ESP teaching and glossary development**

The glossary and activities based on it were made available on the web (at our university links, e.g., <http://epcc.unex.es>, [www.unex.es/lengingles/ALejandto.htm](http://www.unex.es/lengingles/ALejandto.htm), and the Moodle platform mentioned above). The undergraduate university students could thus access the alphabetical and frequency lists of academic words with which to answer various on-line questions on word order and formation. For example, given a set of words such as *accounting*, *account*, *accounted*, *accounts*, they have to find the most frequent item and determine its collocations (with verbs, nouns, adjectives, and so forth); then, to translate such constructions into Spanish. The aim of these weekly activities is to familiarize students with the glossary, but not to build lexical knowledge. In fact, according to most students' answers in the post-task questionnaire (see Appendix) given out at the end of the course, the wordlist-based activities are fairly easy but do not contribute to their assimilation of lexical items (questions 4 and 5).

Instead, what seems to qualify as worthwhile lexical development has been a direct approach to the glossary, even though students are divided concerning the type of lexical material explored and how it was organized (see questions 7 and 8 in the post-task questionnaire). They seem to particularly favour the use of lexical skimming and

scanning in order to figure out expressions and write them in different exercises, especially translation (see questions 6, 9 and 10).

The most common type of activities based on the corpus tends to involve the use of academic collocates (see Appendix for the test given to learners, where matching, fill-in-the-gap, cloze, translation, and writing exercises are included). Learners tend to value as highly positive to be able to decode academic collocations from Spanish into English (question 12). In addition, related to this is the notion of having to pair up lexical items derived from common corpus-driven expressions (e.g. *exchange + information with*). Collocations were examined extensively in the glossary. For instance, matching exercises were developed as a need to ‘visualize’ the company that node words in the glossary keep. Both commonly used and restrained combinations were explored in this way. In the Appendix (in the test activity A), see, for instance, a more general expression like *may increasingly be* in contrast with *do a significance test*, more typical within Statistics texts. In this test, nonetheless, some types of activities involving collocation work were evaluated as more convenient than others, according to the students. For instance, the activity of matching collocates is seen as less productive for lexical development.

In turn, Fill-in-the-gap exercises (e.g., activity B in test) derive from corpus analysis focusing on lexical development within co-texts or concordance lines. The basis for this type of activity is given by key concordance lines where explicit use of collocations is shown. This type of exercise is valued more highly by students in the questionnaires. Its development corresponds to the need for actual co-texts where node words are found. The selection of these concordance lines is made in agreement with semantic units unfolded for each expression; for instance, for the item *run on*, the key structure in this corpus is *run on + computerized device*. Students seem to favour this kind of help in the exercise, as it apparently improves their recognition of the expressions.

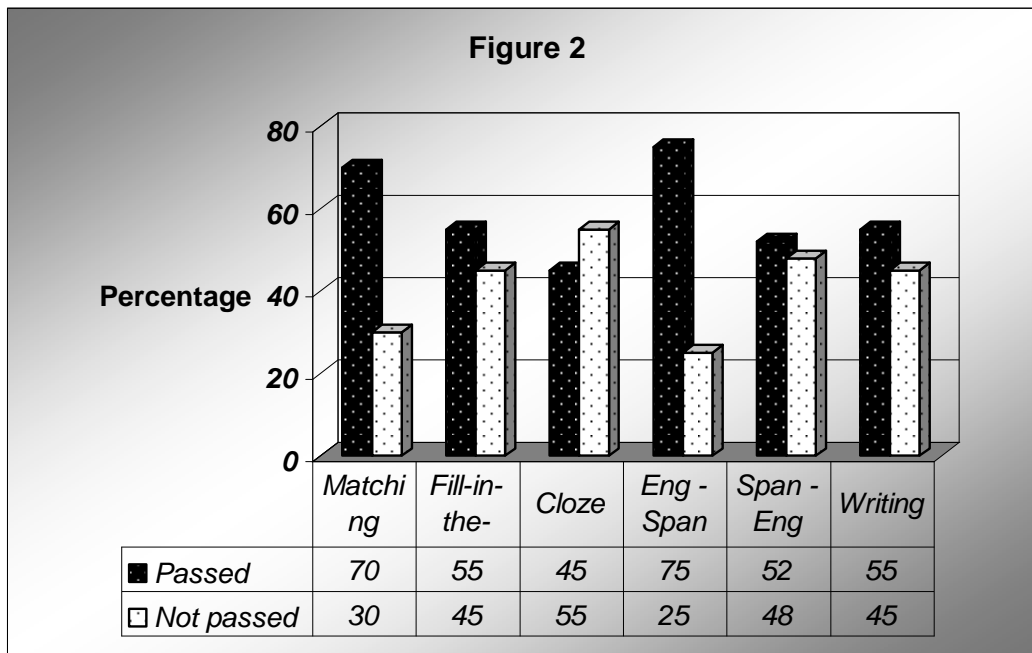
Thirdly, cloze exercises (exercise C in test) also originate as a consequence of corpus-based approaches. In this case, textual chunks containing words that typically co-occur with a given node may be easily spotted and provided to students (e.g., by conducting concordance searches of words in context). This type of lexical gapping is similar to Coxhead’s AWL exercises on the web (<http://gpoulard.tripod.com/index.htm>), where core items from the lists can be automatically removed so that learners can work with them in the paragraphs.



Nonetheless, the Cloze activity with whole paragraphs is not evaluated as important by students – see question 15 in Appendix – even though more context for the lexical items is provided.

The other three activities given in the test are two translations of paragraphs (direct and reversed translations) and a short written composition. According to the questionnaires, in terms of communicative skills, students judge that it was their writing which benefited most (question 16 in the Appendix). Then, according to their answers given for question 17, their favourite topics to write about are socio-technical (e.g., giving opinions about advantages and disadvantages on the use of technology in society). Regarding the least improved skill, most answers refer to listening (questions 18) because in many cases (question 19), students claim that there should have been more audios and videos in class or on the Web (see activities on the webpages referred above). Finally, the majority of the students (more than 50 percent) favour the integration of the glossary in the ESP class (question 20), reasoning in some cases that it provides clear evidence about the important language that they should know for their academic work.

Given the percentages of the 40 surveyed students (see Appendix), in order to either corroborate or contradict the stated ideas and opinions, the post-test described above was evaluated by the teacher. This evaluation consisted of the six types of exercises named, focusing on glossary-based lexical items; each activity was evaluated from 1 to 10 (a 5 as a passing grade). In the test, the activity done best by students is the English-to-Spanish translation, as can be examined in Figure 2, followed by the Matching exercise. The one done with the most mistakes is the Cloze exercise.



Some results in Figure 2 can be contrasted with ideas and impressions received from the questionnaires. For example, according to question 13, the matching activities are considered less interesting, and yet, this type of work was performed well in the post-test. In turn, the Fill-in-the-gap task is regarded as relevant and useful, but it was done more poorly in the test. In the translations, even though learners tend to view Spanish-to-English translation as more relevant and productive, it is the English-to-Spanish translating task that they do better.

### Conclusions

Based on the observation of class work, questionnaire answers, and post-test results, some conclusions regarding the nature of corpus-based applications in ESP may be considered. By following the surveyed percentages (see Appendix), some inferences can be drawn in relation to the type of learning context developed.

As answers to questions 1 and 2 demonstrate, most students have recently had English classes and, in most cases, ESP courses at university. For these learners, knowledge of vocabulary was not the highest concern, as responses in question 3 show. In fact, the majority felt less confident about speaking / pronunciation skills. As a result, at this initial stage, we would feel that this class has an average / intermediate level of English and, as typically occurs with Spanish EFL learners, they demand more oral

practice. Then, given their impressions to the material assigned and exploited in this class, and by assessing their scores achieved in the test, a different picture is obtained to some degree. The use of the glossary for lexical activities offered little difficulty according to learners, and writing as well as translation skills seemed to benefit most from this material. However, the results in the test point to too many mistakes (below passing) for the types of activities actually claimed by students as most profitable (Spanish-to-English translating, Fill-in-the-gap, and writing on a known socio-technical topic).

Such apparent contradictions may lead to some assertions about ESP development: students appreciate the focus on actual lexical items that are significant and common core in their studies; for instance, they realise that translating academic lexical constructions fosters their decoding skills to clarify semantic aspects in the expressions. Still, learners do not apply this knowledge to encoding activities as well as should be expected in the test on their linguistic intake. In this respect, the answers given to question 11 in the Appendix provide a more realistic outcome of their course work. Most students perceive that they have improved their mental lexical database in part or a little, and few of them answer much or hardly.

As a result of the above, it would seem that there is a need to redirect the corpus-based approach to a learning process that may enhance the learners' progress regarding word behaviour assimilation. A glossary of academic items such as the BIT common core resource should probably have to enable greater active participation; for instance, a more active elaboration of the entries by having students work with the corpus in electronic form, as some authors have recently pointed out for the EFL and ESP learning contexts (e.g., Connor and Upton, 2005; Gavioli, 2005). In fact, as the answers given by students to question 20 may suggest, the exploitation of common core glossaries in ESP such as the BIT resource can be extended to other (more advanced) courses. Some fair reasons include the importance that knowing such academic / common core language implies for students' future jobs (which will involve much handling of information (in English) related to business technology).

In addition, oral work is perceived as a highly demanded task by our L2 learners. The course integrates the obligation to perform various oral discussions and a presentation about a topic chosen from the class syllabus. Most presentations usually demonstrate a fairly suitable use of academic vocabulary and expressions, many of them collected in the glossary (e.g., *information exchange, available on the Web,*

*management tools, face + competition*, etc). Nonetheless, a significant number of the students surveyed (45 per cent) felt quite nervous and intimidated by having to speak in public about such matter, and 30 per cent of them skipped the presentations alleging their lack of competence for the task. In this sense, the corpus-based approach should also encourage oral work (e.g., by fostering confidence through the investigation of word relations to confirm and / or contrast knowledge).

The new scope offered in this ESP course has included the significance of suitably assessing the development of a lexical focus. The academic / research language exploited is perceived as crucial by students, but a relevant percentage of these fail to reflect its production and assimilation along the work done in class. Therefore, the goal of providing students with effective communicative means in the form of key academic language partially succeeds. The corpus-based glossary seems to motivate learners' decoding skills. Activities such as identifying key repetitions, formulating semantic prosody, finding best equivalents in Spanish, and so forth, are generally regarded as positive by students, but do not lead to optimal results in the tests.

The integration of the glossary framework in the ESP curriculum may thus be evaluated as having an acceptable reach in the learning process, but should be further explored for future courses. A possibility may involve the availability of a wider range of on-line tools and applications that enable students to become actual decision-making agents in the design of the corpus-based language. In other words, the glossary may be explored not so much as a product available to learners, but as a means. Its construction may be posed as a challenge for students so that they may work with lexical information to build their own lexical entries. Future research may then query whether a more active involvement on the part of students (e.g., in the building of the BIT glossary entries) can produce better results. This line of work may parallel similar recent studies, such as Paquot (2005), focusing on productively oriented academic word lists. The subjects included in such an experiment would thus become an experimental group whose performance can be contrasted with the 40 students tested in this paper (a control group). Such a research focus may further investigate the influence of the corpus approach on our ESP courses at an intermediate stage of L2 learning.

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## Appendix

### Post-task questionnaire

Number of students tested = 40 Business English students (third year)= 15 Computer English students (second year)= 25	
<p>1. <i>When was the last time that you studied English previous to this class?</i></p> <p>Never / Last semester (5%) / one year ago (75%) / two years ago / three years ago (15%) / more than three years ago (5%)</p> <p>2. <i>When was the last time that you studied English at university for your current or other degree?</i></p> <p>Never (26%) / Last semester (5%) / One year ago (62%) / two years ago / Three years ago (7%) / more than three years ago</p> <p>3. <i>Which aspect of language do you feel less confident about?</i></p> <p>None (3%) / Vocabulary (25%) / Grammar (5%) / Speaking- Pronunciation (55%) / Understanding – Listening (7%) / Translating (5%)</p> <p>4. <i>How did you find the tasks based on the wordlists?</i></p> <p>Very easy (5%) / Easy (50%) / Average (35%) / Hard (10%) / Very hard</p> <p>5. <i>Did the online wordlist tasks help you to remember words?</i></p> <p>Never (10%) / Hardly (60%) / Sometimes (20%) / Often (10%) / Very often</p> <p>6. <i>How did you find the use of the glossary (i.e., skimming and scanning for lexical information)?</i></p> <p>Very easy / Easy (3%) / Average (57%) / Hard (30%) / Very hard (10%)</p> <p>7. <i>What did you especially like about the glossary?</i></p> <p>Type of words (20%) / Listing / organization of items (35%) / Pronunciation clues (15%) / Translation (25%) / Other (25%) –e.g., texts and exercises</p> <p>8. <i>What did you especially dislike about the glossary?</i></p> <p>Type of words (30%) / Listing / organization of items (40%) / Pronunciation clues / Translation (5%) / Other (25%) --e.g., no pictures, more oral activities, etc</p> <p>9. <i>What did the glossary help you the most with?</i></p> <p>Find expressions and equivalents (5%) / Identify meanings (35%) / Understand texts (5%) / Translate texts (55%) / Other</p> <p>10. <i>What did the glossary help you the least with?</i></p> <p>Find expressions and equivalents (7%) / Identify meanings (10%) / Understand texts (62%) / Translate texts (5%) / Other (16%) –e.g., oral skills, write</p>	

11. *Do you consider that your lexical knowledge has improved with the use of this glossary?*

No (3%) / Hardly (7%) / A little (45%) / In part (35%) /  
 Much (3%) / Very much / Yes (7%)

12. *What kind of activity helped you the most to improve your lexical knowledge? (if you answered affirmatively to the previous question)*

None / Word identification (15%) / Lexical combination building (15%) /  
 Lexical combination translation (55%) / Writing expressions (10%) / Other (3%) –e.g.,  
 finding synonyms

13. *Score the MATCHING exercises from 5 (most relevant) to 1 (least relevant) for your learning in the class:*

1 (10%) / 2 (70%) / 3 (20%) / 4 / 5

14. *Score the FILL-IN-THE-GAP exercises from 5 (most relevant) to 1 (least relevant) for your learning in the class:*

1 (5%) / 2 (10%) / 3 (45%) / 4 (40%) / 5

15. *Score the CLOZE exercises from 5 (most relevant) to 1 (least relevant) for your learning in the class:*

1 (7%) / 2 (35%) / 3 (45%) / 4 (13%) / 5

16. *Which skill did you improve most in class?*

None (7%) / Reading (3%) / Writing (57%) / Listening /  
 Speaking (10%) / Other (23%) –e.g., translating, relating equivalents, etc

17. *For the skill you chose in the previous question, specify the aspect that you liked in the development of this skill in class:*

OPEN ANSWERS (e.g., topics for writing and speaking, translation exercises, etc)

18. *Which skill did you improve least in class?*

None (3%) / Reading (5%) / Writing (3%) / Listening (62%) /  
 Speaking (27%) / Other

19. *For the skill you chose in the previous question, specify the aspect that you disliked in the development of this skill in class:*

OPEN ANSWERS (e.g., not enough audio work in class, discussions, etc)

20. *Explain in two or three sentences if you would or would not favor the use of glossaries like this in future courses, and why or why not:*

OPEN ANSWERS (e.g., yes, because of important language; yes, but with a greater focus on speaking, etc)

**Test based on corpus-based vocabulary**

A.

**Check the glossary to:**

**Find the keyword that combines with BOTH words in each line. Select it from the various words offered in the box:**

Increasingly / data / significance / available / effective /  
 providing / developed / computer / rate / listed /  
 engine / performance / approach

DO + \_\_\_\_\_ + TEST

ALTERNATIVE + \_\_\_\_\_ + TO

SEARCH + \_\_\_\_\_ + PERFORMANCE

MAY + \_\_\_\_\_ + BE

COST + \_\_\_\_\_ + TECHNOLOGY

**B. Fill in the gaps with one lexical item from each row (the same word is used in each separate box or group of lines, so, be cautious and read all lines well before making your choice – hints are provided under each box to help--):**

For	above	over
Give	provide	afford
Improve	increase	go up
Execute in	run in	run on
Leave	drop	go

*This report is \_\_\_\_\_ for general information only  
 Information \_\_\_\_\_ by other members  
 process all of the information \_\_\_\_\_ by the other member  
 this is the information they are \_\_\_\_\_ with*

\* **Hint= this is a word commonly used to refer to distributing some type of documentation, information or data (often electronically).**

*language for Windows. Its version won't \_\_\_\_\_ non-Microsoft operating systems,  
 foundations for nearly all programs that \_\_\_\_\_ personal computers today,  
 A program written in Java is supposed to \_\_\_\_\_ any computer, regardless of the hardware  
 have to think about whether the software will \_\_\_\_\_ Ethernet or ATM networks;*

\* **Hint= this is a word commonly used to refer to the working of some type of program or system in computerized environments.**

*sales \_\_\_\_\_ by 3 million dollars per year  
 overstate that the "true" prices \_\_\_\_\_ by around 20 percent per year  
 the costs \_\_\_\_\_ slowly year by year, leading to higher wages  
 sales \_\_\_\_\_ by 30%, or by a factor of 1.3*

\* **Hint= this is a word commonly used to refer to the expansion of economic activities (sales, buys, costs, prices, etc).**

*10 per cent of the original enterprises have \_\_\_\_\_ out of the sample  
 probability of \_\_\_\_\_ out of the sample at each value  
 this data treatment may be more likely to \_\_\_\_\_ out of the study  
 unsuccessful innovators have \_\_\_\_\_ out of the panel*



\* **Hint= this is a word commonly used to refer to the exclusion of subjects / items from a study (research, analysis, survey, etc).**

*to and how those risks change \_\_\_ time. Definition of Risk The equity and penance. 1 Introduction \_\_\_ the past decade, a substantial non-occurrences of something \_\_\_ a set of time intervals. Tests*

\* **Hint= this is a word commonly used with time expressions to refer to duration (both abstract and specific).**

**C. Complete the gaps with the words from the box below:**

\_\_\_\_\_ the past decade, both academics and the business press have periodically revisited the so-called "productivity paradox" of computers: while delivered computing-power in the United States has increased by more than two orders of magnitude since the early 1970s (figure 1), productivity, especially in the service \_\_\_\_\_, seems to have stagnated (figure 2). Despite the enormous promise of information technology (IT) to effect "the biggest technological revolution men have known" (Snow, 1966), disillusionment and frustration with the technology are \_\_\_\_\_ in headlines like "Computer \_\_\_\_\_ Overload Limits Productivity Gains" (Zachary, 1991). Interest in the "productivity paradox" has engendered a \_\_\_\_\_ amount of \_\_\_\_\_. Although \_\_\_\_\_ analyzed statistics extensively during the 1980s, they found little \_\_\_\_\_ that information technology \_\_\_\_\_ increased productivity. As Robert Solow quipped, "you can see the computer age everywhere but in the productivity statistics."

The following words will fill the gaps:

significantly	data	evidence	evident	over	research	researchers	sector
significant							

**D. Translate the following into Spanish:**

An interesting discussion is currently taking place between the banking industry and its supervisors regarding the adoption of a models-based approach to measuring credit risk for regulatory capital purposes. Such a discussion would have been unthinkable just a few years ago and is evidence of the impressive advances in risk measurement that have been made by the industry in a relatively short space of time. This rapid pace of change contrasts with the initial slowness that banks exhibited towards the adoption of new capital management techniques, at least relative to some other industries. This is understandable since, until the end of the 1970s, the financial sector was so heavily protected that there was practically no need to worry about the efficient allocation of resources. Unfortunately, this delay may in part explain some of the recent experiences where institutions suffered large losses – and consumed large amounts of capital. Some of the most notable examples are corporate lending just about everywhere, but especially in Asia, property-related lending in the last recession and inadequate operational risk management (most notably the Barings case). The excess of capital that had flowed into the financial

system might also have contributed to these events: as the capital held by an institution increases, the ability to generate a sufficient return on equity decreases, inducing the institution to take on riskier activities. Ironically, this build up in capital occurred partly in response to calls from regulators for institutions to increase their capital ratios, i.e, the actions taken to prevent banks from assuming too much risk may actually have encouraged them to take on more risk.

**E. Translate the following into English:**

El sistema de gestión de base de datos tiene un motor de búsqueda que permite al usuario utilizar la herramienta de la forma más sencilla posible. Parece probable que los usuarios serán capaces de acceder al sistema cuando quieran y desde donde quieran. Además, mediante una red digital de servicios integrados, los pedidos podrán ser hechos desde cualquier punto de salida y venta.

**F. Write a 6-10 sentence composition on the following topic:**

Societies with Information technology vs. underdeveloped countries: Differences, disadvantages, issues, conflicts, solutions...

# ON THE WEB

## HOW GOOD ARE ESL/EFL WEBSITES?

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### Abstract

The article features the review of three well known EFL/ESL websites, evaluated against some general criteria, based on SLA principles, and some specific ones, in order to find out whether they may provide any added value compared to currently published materials, as well as to highlight what they can actually offer learners. The article also sets out to discuss whether the Web has fulfilled any of the numerous promises it seemed to offer EFL/ESL learners when it first came around.

**Dave’s ESL Café**, <http://www.eslcafe.com/>

**LearnEnglish**, <http://www.learnenglish.org.uk/>

**English-Zone**, <http://english-zone.com/index.php>

### Introduction

The World Wide Web has been about, in its full potential, for more than ten years. Though continuously evolving, this technology can be considered as quite settled both in its general features and in its basic tools. Welcomed by many enthusiasts as a revolution, it seemed to hold wonders in store for EFL/ESL learning. It promised constant *exposure* to the target language, with loads of ready available resources; easy, fast, *autonomous learning*, and interesting, varied and challenging activities; endless *interaction* with native and non-native speakers through e-mail, forums, chats and virtual environments of any sorts. All this more or less for free.

Has the Web lived up to its promise? Or has it petered out, as many other modern utopias? In particular, are EFL/ESL websites likely to fulfil any of the promises stated above? Do the materials they provide offer any added value, compared to published ones? Have they evolved or remained more or less the same? What do these sites actually have to offer EFL/ESL learners? The article sets out to answer at least some of these questions, through a review of three widely popular EFL/ESL websites – *Dave’s*

*ESL Café*, *English-Zone*, *LearnEnglish* – evaluating them against some general criteria, based on SLA principles, and some specific ones.

### 1. Overview of the three sites

The three websites have been chosen because they seemed to supply suitable examples of what EFL sites have to offer to general learners. In fact, though not featuring structured language courses, they provide extra practice and support to learners who are studying English either on their own or in some sort of formal setting. In addition, the three sites are organised according to varying approaches, thus setting forth the opportunity to compare/contrast different features, in order to decide which ones best suit learners' needs and requirements.

**Dave's ESL Café** and **English-Zone** have been around for nearly ten years. ESL Californian teachers David Sterling and Kaye Mastin Mallory, respectively, created them and still keep them going, updating materials and offering support to learners. **LearnEnglish** has no indication on when it was set up, is probably more recent and is due to the joint effort of a team of “teachers and educationalists employed by the British Council and partner organisations” [1].

Dave's ESL Café, which mainly relies on interaction, is made up of 3 sections. *Stuff for teachers*, *Stuff for students*, *Stuff for everyone* – the fourth section, *Jobs*, has recently been added. *Stuff for students* features a *Help Centre*, which is actually a forum where learners can post language related questions of any kind. Dave Sterling himself, or some other learner, will answer them. There are also subsections on *Idioms*, *Slang*, *Quizzes* on different topics, and a wide set of student *Forums*, ranging from *Computers* and *Sports* to *Science*, *Learning English* and even *The Strange and Mysterious*. *Stuff for everyone*, on the other hand, contains a *Chat Central*, to which learners can register if they wish to experience a chat in English in a protected environment, a section on *Podcasting* and a wide collection of *EFL links*.

**English-Zone**, which claims to be “the BEST English-Learner's site on the 'Net’”, focuses, though not exclusively, on language form. It features as many as 16 subsections on any possible ESL topic: *Grammar*, *Idioms*, *Verbs*, *Pronunciation*, *Conversation*, *Dictionaries* and even a *Fun Stuff* section, just to quote a few. The sites claims to be updated on a daily basis, thus providing fresh sets of exercise and activities, while keeping up a huge archive of older materials for revision and/or extra practice.

**LearnEnglish** is conceived as a repository of materials to help learners practice and improve their English, particularly the *Learning Central*, meant for general

learners, which has 6 sub-sections dealing with different topics – *Magazines and Themes, Grammar and Test, Sport and Culture, Fun Stuff, Your Turn, Science and History* – plus a recently added section on *Listening*. Every week new content is added to each section. Previous weeks' content is archived and easily accessible for further practice. Activities range from gap filling to multiple choice, from matching to sentence re-arranging, covering all possible kinds, from highly structured to completely free ones. The site is highly organised and different sections and activities are clearly marked.

The three sites seem widely popular. David Sperling claims his **ESL Café** gets million of hits every month, though the statistics show that it has had about 20 million hits altogether [2]. **English-Zone** provides no information on overall visitors, but single pages highlight hundreds or thousands hits. Though there's no indication as to the number of visits to **LearnEnglish**, given the popularity and reliability of the British Council, it must get lots of hits. This popularity seems to point out that there's a demand for the materials and services provided by these sites.

Both **Dave's ESL Café** and **English-Zone** are privately funded, though they have gradually accepted selected advertising to face costs. **English-Zone** has recently shifted to paying membership for some content and services. **LearnEnglish** is completely free and does not contain advertising, "it does however promote English language courses, publications and educational services" [3].

## 2. Procedure

Comparative reviews of EFL/ESL websites have been attempted many times, even on an extensive scale [4], but as often as not, they simply provide a rubric of tools and materials. To my knowledge a principled evaluation on the learning potential of websites has never been attempted, probably because evaluating them is not easy. First and foremost, it is almost impossible to select specific target learners. Webmasters claims do not help, being, if possible, even vaguer than publisher's claims. Here's the gist for each of the three sites.

**Dave's ESL Café** intends to be "a colourful, fun, interactive, and friendly virtual community that connects both students and teachers together". "**English-Zone's** goal is to provide visitors with engaging, entertaining, yet educational activities, language lessons, and interactive language exercises". **LearnEnglish** is "a safe, fun, educational place on the Internet [...] It is like a restaurant with a long menu of learning activities,

not designed for complete beginners or very advanced learners, but every learner in between should be able to find something they can understand and practise” [5].

Thus, target learners might be young adults, or teenagers, who wish to improve their English, but also want to have some fun. They have a computer, basic technical skills and some time to spare. They may be studying in a formal learning context - language course, school, university – they may need extra resources or clarification on specific points and be willing to try some sort of interaction. They might either know what they need perfectly well or just browse around out of sheer curiosity. Learners of this sort might be very demanding or very easily contented. Vague as all this sounds, one can hardly get any closer to outlining a learner’s profile.

Whatever the case, one cannot but agree with Tomlinson (2001) that good language materials should provide “learners with engaging and purposeful interaction with language in use”. This ought to be especially true for materials in EFL/ESL websites, since they are mainly meant for self-use. That’s why it is so important to set up some principled criteria against which to evaluate them. These criteria should be based on SLA principles and ought to measure the added value offered by technology at the same time. The three sites will be evaluated after choosing the criteria and establishing a grading scale, in order to better compare the results.

### **3. Evaluation criteria**

Though not specifically referring to EFL/ESL websites, Tomlinson (1998a) [6], suggests a set of basic principles for self-access materials and activities, which can be useful in the selection of criteria for the evaluation of ESL/EFL websites. Here are the criteria formulated from these principles along with a brief rationale. For a complete list see [Appendix](#).

#### ***Impact***

With ESL/EFL websites meant for self-study, the materials and activities they contain should achieve impact in the first place. According to Tomlinson (1998b) “impact is achieved when materials have a noticeable effect on learners, that is, when learners’ curiosity interest and attention is attracted”. Impact might be created by different factors, the main one being choice.

### ***Affective engagement***

As well as achieving impact, the materials and the activities in a website ought to involve the learners affectively. In fact, according to the affective engagement principle, foreign language is more easily acquired if learners feel relaxed, confident and successful and if they are able to respond to the target language holistically, with their whole beings (Tomlinson, 1998c).

### ***Maximisation of the brain's learning potential***

The materials and the activities in a website should stimulate the learners to use both their previous experience and their left and right brain. This principle from Suggestopedia (Lozanov 1978) states that language acquisition is enhanced when the input materials are stimulating and the learning activities are not too simple, so that the learners need to use their previous experience and both their left and right brain to complete them.

### ***Comprehensible input***

Since ESL/EFL websites are virtual self-access centres, with little or no support from teachers, they should provide comprehensible input. Krashen (1985) first elaborated the idea of comprehensible input of a slightly higher level than the learner's. As well as being comprehensible, input needs to be as challenging and as varied as possible, in order to trigger the learners' interest. Thus, selection of input is a key factor for SLA, which needs to be properly reflected in self-access materials.

### ***Self-discovery***

An ESL/EFL website needs to be particularly suitable for the learners to invest effort and attention in their learning activity. This principle, explored by many researchers (see, e.g., Ellis, 1990 or Bolitho and Tomlinson, 1995) maintains that learning materials and activities should help the learners to make informed decisions and self-discoveries.

### ***Learning styles***

As ESL/EFL websites are meant for the general learners, they should consider that users might have different learning styles. Thus, the activities and the materials they provide should cater not only for the analytic but also for the reflective and experiential learners

and take into account the kinaesthetic as well as the auditory and visual learning styles (Ellis, 1990; Oxford, 1990).

### *Layout specifications*

As well as responding to SLA principles an EFL/ESL website should maximise learner ease of use through a series of devices, such as

- Functional layout
- Clear instructions
- Easily retrievable activities
- Teacher support
- Opportunities for interaction

## **4. Report on evaluation**

Though the results of evaluation cannot but be subjective - both for the selection of criteria and the judgements - and though reviews by different reviewers would produce different results, they might point out some common trends and highlight a few meaningful features to reflect upon.

None of the websites got a high overall score. In a total of 80 points **LearnEnglish** got 48 (60%); **ESL Café** scored 46 (57%) and **English-Zone** - 36 (45%). **LearnEnglish** scored better in SLA based criteria, while **ESL Café** and **English-Zone** obtained higher marks in layout specifications. In fact, **LearnEnglish** is a fairly wide repository of language resources, **ESL Café** offers good opportunities for interaction and feedback and **English-Zone** provides online support for registered users. These results apparently point out that the selected websites might not have a very high learning potential, notwithstanding their popularity and claims. A closer look at each of the criteria in detail will help to gain deeper insight.

### *Impact*

The three websites, and particularly **LearnEnglish**, offer so wide a choice of topics and materials that they seem able to achieve impact. It's a pity no audio or video materials are available in any of them, even though they contain links to audio and video resources. The popularity of the three sites confirms that at least some specific features are likely to attract the learners' curiosity and attention: the problem is whether the



activities provided are able to keep them up. Unfortunately none of the three sites features very motivating activities, providing multiple choice, gap filling, matching, cloze, that is, activities suitable for self-marking and focused feedback. As Tomlinson (1998a) rightly points out, “the development of self-access material has been a positive feature of the foreign language pedagogy in the last decade (or so)” but “in order to make sure that learners can work entirely on their own and still receive feedback, there’s been a limiting tendency to restrict activities to those which can more easily be self-marked”. The underlying pedagogical approach of the three sites seems to be PPP, with a focus on the first two Ps, that is, the same approach informing most published ESL/EFL materials for the global market.

### *Affective engagement*

If affective engagement is achieved by lack of stress, all the sites would manage to involve even the most anxious learners. If it is achieved through catching materials and challenging activities, none of them is likely to get very far. They all provide a fun stuff sections with jokes, stories, games, funny pictures, but the main learning activities are neither affectively engaging nor cognitively challenging, being of the restricted types described in the previous paragraph. Of the three websites, **LearnEnglish** makes at least some attempts at providing some open-ended activities. For instance, in *Stories And Poems*, after reading *The Banyan Tree* by Tagore, learners are requested to complete the following task: “Write a poem about a tree or another type of plant. Send us your texts”. The same task is proposed for any poem or story presented. In fact, quite a few learners from all over the world actually sent poems or comments on articles and stories. Some are really good, confirming that open ended, challenging activities do appeal to learners.

### *Maximisation of the brain’s learning potential*

Unfortunately, neither the materials nor the activities included in the three website make much reference to the learners’ experience or life. They are up to developing explicit, declarative knowledge, with almost no attempt to develop procedural knowledge of the language, that is of how language is used to achieve specific purposes. See Tomlinson (1998a): “Many self-access materials designed to individualise learning treat learners as though they are stereotypical clones of each other”. ESL/EFL websites seem to follow no different pattern from currently published materials.

### *Comprehensible input*

The three websites certainly offer rich and varied exposure to language in use, particularly **LearnEnglish**, which provides a wide range of text types and genres, including literature and songs. **English-Zone** has a comparatively narrower range of texts, being mainly focused on language form, but has a really good section on language curios and strange facts, which may appeal to many learners. None of the three sites contains extensive reading, audio or video materials. **English-Zone** and **ESL Café** partly compensate this with direct interaction, while **LearnEnglish**, in the FAQ section, provides links to audio, video and speaking resources. The lack of audio and video further impairs the learning potential, since exposure to aural and oral language is a key factor in SLA. Thus, the greater pity since technology developments would allow ample use of both.

### *Self-discovery*

There's almost no room for self-discovery and language awareness in any of the sites. **English-Zone** contains detailed explanations on any possible tricky or trivial language question, with plenty of practice activities of the structured type. **LearnEnglish** features a specific grammar section, with brief explanatory notes followed by practice exercises. **ESL Café** provides no grammar section. It is up to the learners to ask for clarification, explanation, examples of use, or whatever they may need. Sometimes questions are directly answered, more often a link to a resource is provided. This is the real added value of **ESL Café**: learners have to work out a solution for their specific problem on their own browsing online resources.

### *Learning styles*

The materials and the activities in the three websites, particularly in **English-Zone**, mostly cater for analytical, reflective learners who prefer to learn with written language and like to focus on discrete bits of it. There's little or no opportunity for global kinaesthetic learners, that is, those learners who would possibly benefit most from self-access materials to do things their own way.

### *Layout specifications*

Though completely different, the layout can be considered functional for the chosen focus of each site. **ESL Café** and **English-Zone** have remained more or less the same since they were first created; **LearnEnglish** has recently undergone a restyling, moving most materials and activities to a new site. Specific sections and different types of materials and activities are quite clearly marked in all the sites. Some activities can be retrieved from more than one place causing a bit of confusion that does not seriously impair ease of use. Instructions are quite clear and up to the point, even though they do not sound particularly friendly in **LearnEnglish**, while they are somewhat confusing in **ESL Café**. In **English-Zone**, instead, it is not always clear what is meant for whom, or what is the purpose of some activities. Materials are quite easy to retrieve and load in all the sites, even though in **LearnEnglish**, loading activities can take too long at times. **ESL Café** provides feedback from teachers on specific topics for free; **English-Zone** does so only for paying users, while **LearnEnglish** has no such service. No doubt, this is an added value for **ESL Café** along with the availability of interaction tools, completely lacking in **LearnEnglish**.

## 5. Overall evaluation

**ESL Café** is the website with the highest **Layout specifications** score. Even though it has no restriction, it has quite a clear target: late teenagers or young adults still in formal education. It is particularly useful for learners with specific questions or problems, who are aware of their learning needs. It is perfect for interaction with peers from all over the world. It is not particularly good for extra practice, since it has little choice of materials and activities and, even though it provides a huge amount of links to language resources, they are not easily available, unless you are very experienced at searching and retrieving info.

**English-Zone** is the site with the lowest global score. Wishing to cater for any language learner it ends up having no clear target. In fact some materials and activities seem more suitable for young learners, others for adults, others for no learner in particular. Indications of level are somewhat confusing. It might be useful for reflective learners requiring guided practice on specific language points, but it has not as wide a choice as **LearnEnglish**, and an even more limited availability of activity types. The site offers tools for Interaction and feedback from teachers but only to paying users, while one of the best sections in the site is the fun stuff.

**LearnEnglish** is the site with the highest overall score. Though aiming to reach as wide an audience as possible, it sets up an implicit target, late teenagers-young adults, wishing to improve their proficiency. It has a huge availability of resources and might be useful for extra practice on specific language points or for reading. A very good section is the fun stuff with games, cartoons and trivia. It is the best repository of resources. Unfortunately it does not provide any tools for interaction, either with peers or teachers.

## Conclusions

Apparently the selected sites do not have a very high learning potential, notwithstanding their claims. In fact, at a closer look, they show no substantial difference from current published materials, either for self-access or classroom use, apart from the huge amount of resources they contain. None of them seems to exploit the technology potential of the Web to its full extent. Possibly they never will, since they have undergone no relevant change over time.

One reason might be cost-effectiveness. Putting up, maintaining and updating a website is quite costly, time consuming and difficult to make it pay, so each site had to find direct or indirect ways of making a revenue of a sort. **LearnEnglish** seems to be kept there to attract learners and redirect them to learn English somewhere else - paying language courses, exams. **English-Zone** lures learners with sample materials and activities just to get them pay for the real thing. **ESL Café** provides help and support but gets selected advertising and book selling in exchange.

What will happen to ESL/EFL free websites? Will they be discarded? Will they be taken over by publishers? Will they die of their own accord? Or will they completely shift to paying membership? One thing is clear from the evaluation: the ideal online resource for self-access ESL/EFL learning would have to combine the rich repository of resources in **LearnEnglish**, the opportunities for interaction and support in **ESL Café** and **English-Zone**, the audio and video resources one could find, say, in BBC, plus some sophisticated collaboration tools for voice interaction. Add to this meaningful, challenging activities, which hopefully maximise the brain's learning potential and cater for any type of learner, and you get... a chimera, that is, a cyber combination that will never be.

Let's wait for new technology developments and see what they get in store. Let's also hope that a few pioneers with a vision - like David Sterling ten years ago - may be

willing to invest time and energy to make experiments for the benefits of language learners, hopefully keeping in mind a few sound SLA principles while so doing.

### Notes

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1 See the section *What is Learnenglish?*

2 There's no way to decide how many are repeat hits and how many are the idle surfers and browsers.

3 See the section *About Learnenglish*

4 See, for instance Krajka (2002)

5 These statements are from the three websites *FAQ* or *About us* section respectively.

6 The principles include: be self-access, with choice of learning routes, type, time and pace; be open-ended, with a variety of acceptable answers; engage the learners affectively; involve the learners as whole human beings; require the learners' personal investment to foster self-discoveries; stimulate left and right brain to maximise the brain's learning potential; provide varied and comprehensible input.

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## Appendix

### EVALUATION CRITERIA

Each criteria is intended for a 1 to 5 grading – 1 lowest grade, 5 highest grade – 80 points altogether.

<b>Evaluation Criteria</b>	<b>ESL Sites</b>		
<b>SLA Based Criteria</b>	<b>DESL</b>	<b>EZ</b>	<b>LE</b>
1. Does the website provide choice of topics, routes, texts and activities?	3	3	5
2. Are the activities open-ended and varied enough for different learners?	3	2	3
3. Are the materials likely to involve the learners affectively?	1	1	2
4. Are the materials likely to involve the learners cognitively?	2	2	2
5. Do the activities require the learners to rely on their experience?	3	1	2
6. Do the activities stimulate both the left and right brain?	1	2	2
7. Does the website offer rich exposure to language in use?	3	3	5
8. Does the website offer comprehensible exposure to language in use?	4	4	5
9. Are the materials and the activities likely to foster learners' investment?	3	1	3
10. Are the materials and the activities likely to facilitate for self-discovery?	3	1	2
11. Do the materials and the activities cater for different learning styles?	1	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>62%</b>

<b>Layout specifications</b>	<b>DESL</b>	<b>EZ</b>	<b>LE</b>
12. Is the layout functional?	3	3	4
13. Do the instructions make it clear what the learners ought to do?	3	3	5
14. Are the activities easy to retrieve and load?	4	4	3
15. Is there support available?	5	3	1
16. Does the site provide opportunities for interaction?	4	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>56%</b>

**Total**    **46**    **36**    **48**  
**Percentage**    **57%**    **45%**    **60%**

## MORE ON LEGAL ENGLISH ON THE WEB

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### Introduction

This paper attempts to help the Legal English (LE) teacher of non-native speakers (NNSs) find useful web-based resources for his teaching. Even though there are many websites which approach the task of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), this is not the case with LE. We have few printed resources to approach the task of teaching LE and we have even fewer on the web. Therefore, the aim of the present author was to search the Web and find some of the available websites which could help LE teachers in their daily practice.

### Legal English on the Web

The reason why I call this paper “More Legal English on the Web” is that we already have “**Recommended websites:** Top Ten Web Sites for the Legal English Teacher”, in which ten different websites for the legal English teacher are the subject of analysis. But I have come across other interesting sites on the Web for the language teacher and in this paper I have also included sites which will help us with the world of legal Latin, so common in legal English texts.

### 1. The Onestop English for Specific Purposes bank

(<http://www.onestopenglish.com/Business/Bank/>)

The Onestop English for Specific Purposes bank is defined as a growing bank of lesson plans covering a wide range of professions. The aim of this section, according to the website, is to build a bank of practical materials for teachers of English who are working with students with specific linguistic needs related to their professions, including EAP (English for Academic Purposes), CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), Banking and financial services, General ESP, Hotel and tourism, Human resources, Law, Marketing, Medicine, The oil industry, Sales and Science.

The lesson plans on a range of *legal subjects* provided at <http://www.onestopenglish.com/Business/Bank/Legal/index.htm> include the following topics so far:

- The English Constitution, <http://www.onestopenglish.com/Business/Bank/Legal/constitution.htm>
- Solicitors and Barristers, <http://www.onestopenglish.com/Business/Bank/Legal/solicitors.htm>
- An overview of the legal profession, <http://www.onestopenglish.com/Business/Bank/Legal/legalprofession.htm>
- Defamation, <http://www.onestopenglish.com/Business/Bank/Legal/defamation.htm>
- The law of contract, <http://www.onestopenglish.com/Business/Bank/Legal/contract.htm>

## **2. About.com** ([http://esl.about.com/library/lexical/bllexlist\\_legal1.htm](http://esl.about.com/library/lexical/bllexlist_legal1.htm))

According to this site, the use of this lexical approach is essential for successful language acquisition in English for Specific Purposes. However, teachers are often not equipped with the exact English terminology required in very specific trade sectors. For this reason, core vocabulary sheets go a long way in helping teachers provide adequate materials for students with English for Special Purposes needs. In order to amend this problem, the site provides English for Special Purposes Core Vocabulary Lists in the following fields:

- English for Advertising
- English for Banking and Stocks
- English for Book Keeping and Financial Administration
- English for Business and Commercial Letters
- English for Human Resources
- English for the Insurance Industry
- English for Logistics
- English for Marketing
- English for Production and Manufacturing
- English for Sales and Acquisitions



Additionally, *English for Legal Purposes* section ([http://esl.about.com/library/lexical/bllexlist\\_legal1.htm](http://esl.about.com/library/lexical/bllexlist_legal1.htm)) features a three-page Legal English Glossary, including legal terms or expressions.

### 3. Legal English Web Resources

#### 3.1. *Legal Latin* (<http://www.dl.ket.org/latin3/mores/legallatin/>)

- Roman Legal System (<http://www.dl.ket.org/latin3/mores/legallatin/legal01.htm>)
- Legal Roles - Then and Now (<http://www.dl.ket.org/latin3/mores/legallatin/legal02.htm>)
- Roman Prisons (<http://www.dl.ket.org/latin3/mores/legallatin/prisons.htm>)
- Legal Vocabulary (<http://www.dl.ket.org/latin3/mores/legallatin/legal03.htm>)
- Latin Phrases used in Legal English (<http://www.dl.ket.org/latin3/mores/legallatin/legal04.htm>)
- Activities (<http://www.dl.ket.org/latin3/mores/legallatin/legal05.htm>): sentence completion; game: Caede Draconem; crossword puzzle; comprehension questions; Heracles Meets the Law, activity answer keys.

#### 3.2. *Online law dictionaries*

- Dictionary (FindLaw.com) - <http://dictionary.lp.findlaw.com/>
- HLS Library: One-L Dictionary (Harvard Law School) - [http://www.law.harvard.edu/library/services/research/guides/united\\_states/basics/one\\_l\\_dictionary.php](http://www.law.harvard.edu/library/services/research/guides/united_states/basics/one_l_dictionary.php)
- Law.com Law Dictionary - <http://dictionary.law.com/>
- yourDictionary.com: Law Dictionary links - <http://www.yourdictionary.com/diction5.html#law>

#### 3.3. *Legal news*

- American Lawyer Media's Law.com - <http://www.law.com/index.shtml>
- CNN.com Law - <http://www.cnn.com/LAW/>
- FindLaw Legal News - <http://news.findlaw.com/>

- JURIST Legal News - <http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/>
- Justice Talking (audio) - <http://www.justicetalking.org/home.asp>

### **3.4. Legal humor and lawyer jokes**

- The Funniest Darn Lawyer Jokes in the WDW (Duhaime.org) - [http://www.duhaime.org/Law\\_fun/jokes.aspx](http://www.duhaime.org/Law_fun/jokes.aspx)
- Lawyer Jokes and Legal Humor (ExpertLaw.com) - <http://www.lawlaughs.com/>
- Legal Humour - <http://www.legalhumour.com/>

### **4. Resources on Latin:**

- Latin Legal Maxims - <http://www.vancouverfamilylaw.com/maxims.html>
- Latin in Modern Legal Terms - <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Sparta/9909/legal.html>
- Understanding Latin Legalese - <http://www.dummies.com/WileyCDA/DummiesArticle/id-1435.html>
- Glossary – Latin Terms - <http://www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk/infoabout/glossary/latin.htm>
- Legal Glossary - <http://www.uklegal.com/articles/latin.htm> (includes Latin and also English terms that are in common use in law)
- Latin: It's All Around Us: Legal Phrases and Sentences - <http://www.bjupress.com/resources/products/latin/legal.html>
- List of legal Latin terms (from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia) - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_legal\\_Latin\\_terms](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_legal_Latin_terms)
- Legal Latin - <http://www.swarb.co.uk/lawb/genLegalLatin.shtml>

### **Conclusion**

Even though there is an enormous range of legal material to be found on the Web, legal English teachers suffer a lack of teaching materials for the NNS LE student. I have made a selection of different websites where NNS LE students can get in touch with the legal language, not only with the legal English language, but also with legal Latin. My main objective is to offer teachers this website selection as a starting point for their own search of the Web resources which best suit their students' language needs.

# **A WORD FROM A TECHIE**

## **R U READY 2 TXT?**

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### **Introduction**

Texting is a form of writing that is still in its development stage, and its development is being driven by forces beyond academic control. Texting, as a genre, is driven by the communication needs of teenage native speakers who possess mobile phones. The entire concept of texting is, therefore, dependent on emerging technology and it is so very new that EFL teachers are forced to play “catch-up”. We can only respond to the developments after they have occurred, and then pass on what we have learnt to our L2 learners.

That having been said, it is also possible for us to transfer data from the slightly more mainstream e-mailing to the understanding of texting, and thus familiarize our students with the process. The following paper will explain how I attempted to do this in an Omani, military context.

### **Texting in Oman**

In 2004, I was approached by the Group Captain in charge of the central Supply Depot of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), who was concerned about the quality of writing in the e-mails that were being sent from the purchasing sections. The Depot conducted extensive correspondence with a range of international suppliers, but the senior non-commissioned officers (NCOs) responsible for this correspondence were effectively untrained in the writing of e-mails.

This was not a particularly difficult task. Kostenbauer (2004) and Tavares (2004) both appear to believe that e-mailing is within the capability of young EFL learners. In the Omani context I was dealing with small groups of senior NCO's who

already had considerable competence in English. They already possessed keyboarding skills. All they lacked was awareness that e-mail writing was more than retyping formal business letters on a computer and then pressing SEND.

Accordingly, I designed a short, five hour course which began with commercially available materials regarding netiquette (Mellor and Crampton, 1996; Powell; 2002) and the writing of e-mails (Emmerson; 2004), before moving on to authentic materials culled from the Supply Depot archives (McBeath 2005). Together, we explored issues like faulty grammar – “the end user want to know”; over familiarity – “Hi there”, when addressing a company; “Hi Sir”, when addressing an officer; and the perennial problem of the automatic spell check – do you mean “reply” or “replay”?

Eco (2000: 126) has said that “any phenomenon, for it to be understood as a sign of something else, and from a certain point of view, must first of all be perceived.” Military personnel will not “perceive” that it is a breach of netiquette to send an e-mail written in upper-case, unless this is explained. It is not a breach of etiquette to write a letter, memo or fax in upper-case, and in military communication, signals are to be written ONLY in upper-case, with paragraphs clearly labeled Alpha, Bravo Charlie etc, and all punctuation marks in parentheses. “Common sense”, i.e. writing in only lower-case, does NOT apply to military personnel, because their common sense would suggest that an important or urgent e-mail should follow the conventions of Signal Writing.

Initially, at the very end of the e-mail writing course, I included some work on texting, but this was effectively an additional, bolt-on module that could have been discarded without weakening the core component.

Even so, my interest in texting had been roused by Norbrook’s (2003) paper “C U L8R”, where phonetic equivalence replaces traditional spelling conventions. This use of English, an almost ludic celebration of the way the language can re-invent itself according to need, has profound implications for all teachers, and in the interest of *future* language developments, I came to believe that it was worthy of greater emphasis.

As the number of e-mail courses that I taught increased, so did the time devoted to texting. We began with an e-mail taken from Medgyes (2002: 74), where the text is such that most of it reads like a conventional, informal letter rather than an e-mail. There are minor changes to standard orthography – Thanx; 4 == for; 2 = to; and the riddle NE1410IS? – Anyone for tennis? As an example, this letter served as an easy introduction to the topic.

We then moved on to a “TXT MSG” displayed on a mobile phone, and taken from Evans (2002; 71). The shorthand text, together with the abbreviations – ravi thnx 4 yr msg im now on train late 4 meet again pls say sorry 4 me c u asap Katie – works as a decoding exercise, but this is still material that is within most students’ competence. It can, moreover, be reinforced by Emmerson’s (2004: 10-12) exercise on Missing Words and Abbreviations, which covers terms like C = see; yr = your and ASAP = as soon as possible.

The next exercise, taken from Carter and McCarthy (2003/2004: 120-121) is considerably more challenging, and is worth citing in full. It consists of an exchange of text messages, between two students called Viki and Sue:-

Viki: It’s snowing quite strong outside .....be careful.  
Sue: I will, thx.  
Viki: wei, wei.....lei dim ar?  
Sue: ok, la, juz got bk from Amsterdam loh, how r u?  
Viki: ok la. I have 9 tmrw.  
Sue: haha, I have 2-4, sooooooooooooo happy.  
Viki: che...anyway...have your rash gone?  
Sue: yes, but I have scar oh.....ho ugly ar.  
Viki: icic.....ng gan yiu la.....still a pretty girl, haha!

It must be remembered that anyone reading this exchange is effectively eavesdropping on a private conversation, with all the in-jokes, understatements and privately coded references that would be expected in unrehearsed speech. Hence the exchange – I have 9 tmrw; haha, I have 2-4 – refers to the next day’s lecture timings, and automatically explains why Sue is “sooooooooooooo happy”. It is interesting to note at this point how closely text English indicates the intonation of Sue’s statement.

Other utterances - “wei, wei.....lei dim ar?” – remain utterly opaque, until it is explained that Viki and Sue are actually Chinese students attending courses in England, and so “ng gan yiu la” is texted Cantonese for “it doesn’t matter.”

The implications here are completely revolutionary. It becomes clear that text messaging not only permits code switching across languages, but also across orthographies. Provided both parties share the same linguistics background(s), there is nothing to prevent Arab, Chinese, Greek, Japanese, Russian or Tamil speakers from

texting each other in Roman letters, substituting L1 lexis where the L1 phonology permits this.

The final example took things one step further. This is a parody, cited by Bragg (2003: 310) but it is a very good parody, written in accordance with texting conventions as they were understood in 2003. It is based on an incident that was mentioned by Norbrook, and before introducing it to the students, I always issue them with a page of emoticons and acronyms from Tavares (2004: 59).

The text reads as follows:-

Dnt u sumX rekn eng lang v lngwindd? 2 mny wds & ltrs? ?nt we b usng lss time & papr? ? we b 4wd tnking + text? 13 yr grl frm w scot 2ndry schl sd ok. Sh rote GCSE eng as (abt hr smmr hols in NY) in txt spk. (NO!) Sh sd sh 4t txt spk was "easr thn standard eng".Sh 4t hr tcher wd be : ) . Hr tcher 4t it was nt so gr8! Sh was : ( & talkd 2 newspprs (but askd 2 b anon). "I cdnt bleve wot I was cing! :o' - ! - ! - ! OW2TE. Sh hd NI@A wot grl was on abut. Sh 4t her pupl was riting in "hieroglyphics".

The exercise was quite simply to rewrite this passage in conventional English, working as a group with teacher support.

The difficulty with this text is, of course, that is its very density. Indeed, it is almost too dense for any individual, unsupported EFL student to understand. Concepts the "w scot 2ndry schl" – a secondary school in the west of Scotland – have to be reconstructed, and terms like "GCSE" rely on cultural knowledge of the type required for the far more obvious "NY" – New York. "4t" for "thought" and "bleve" for "believe", moreover, depend on advanced linguistic understanding. The reader must be aware

- (a) that contemporary vernacular English speakers from the south east of England substitute unvoiced labial dental fricatives for dental fricatives
- (b) that they elide the first syllables of words,
- (c) that British teenagers have learnt this speech from watching the soap opera "Eastenders".

Only then it is impossible to reconstruct these target items. Lacking this wealth of sociolinguistic and cultural data, the non-native speaker really has "NI@A" – no idea at all.

Even so, it is possible to partly reconstruct the text, using awareness of emoticons - :) = happy; :( = unhappy, as these are international in application. So is the use of the ampersand, and terms like b = be; 2 = to; cing = seeing and gr8 = great can be reconstructed as a puzzle.

## **Conclusion**

I do not want to suggest that it is absolutely essential that our students learn to read and send text messages, but I would suggest that it is something that the students themselves might want to do. Andrewes (2005: 5) quotes Kumaravidelu's (2004) statement that "to ignore local exigencies is to ignore lived experiences." And it is extremely easy for even committed stakeholders to be left behind if they fail to identify developing technological and linguistic trends.

One of the most telling differences between Soars and Soars (1996) *New Headway Course* and their *New Headway New Edition* (2003) course is the difference in the size of the mobile phones in the illustrations. Books published as recently as the mid 1990's illustrate huge mobile phones that have neither photographic nor text facilities. This (once cutting edge) technology is unrecognizable to young teenage students today.

IT has transformed the way we work, and it has already influenced the way in which we correspond (Morgan 2005) – both physically and linguistically. Our students must be prepared to move into a new era where human resources become ever more important, and those human resources will require IT support. The English that we are teaching our students now will sustain future economic and personal development, and personal development depends on communication.

How effective this communication can be is illustrated by the following anecdote. In March 2005, large advertising billboards were erected beside the main highway that runs through Muscat, the capital of Oman. Just outside the International Airport, one hoarding asked "R U Ready 4 Red?"

The hoarding was advertising the launch of a new product – Red Mountain Dew – which despite its name is a rather sickly, luridly coloured soft drink aimed at the teenage market. Interestingly, the campaign used texted English, NOT Arabic, to suggest that this was a completely up to date, "hip and happening" product. The very wording (?) of the advertisement was enough to convey the message to the target audience.

Even more interestingly, the campaign worked. Red Mountain Dew became an overnight success, as teenage Omanis drank it by the gallon. They were ready.

R U?

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# FEED MY RSS: USING RSS FEEDS IN WRITING CLASSES

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Publishing on the Web is getting easier every day. [XML](#) has the clearest syntax so far and [RSS feeds – \(Really Simple Syndication\)](#) - has made it even easier to deliver and publish content allowing educators to use more technology in a friendly and amusing way.

We have all seen the small orange **RSS** button. More and more students are subscribing to RSS feeds and use aggregators to read and publish to their own and their friends' blogs. Teachers can use this interest to develop their students' writing skills and teach writing conventions. However, few have looked into how to create their feeds by coding by hand.

## Technicalities for the teacher

RSS XML files have a very clear structure and thus provide a clear framework for writing. Below is a typical RSS outline ready for a teacher to use as a template. (Note: preventing the content to display as xml in this online journal version, angle brackets have been replaced with square brackets: (also here <http://ictlt.teachereducation.org.uk/tutorials/rss.xml>)

```
[?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8" ?]
[rss version="2.0"]
  [channel]
    [title]6B Writing class[/title]
    [link]http://link_of_class_feeds.htm[/link]
    [description]6B Writing class RSS feeds 2005/6 at School_Name, teacher's names[/description]
    [language]en-us[/language]
    [pubDate]Mon, 06 Nov 2006 10:00:00 +0200[/pubDate]
    [lastBuildDate]Mon, 06 Nov 2006 09:55:01 +0200[/lastBuildDate]
    [docs]http://school-web-site/address/where_the_feeds_xml_file_resides[/docs]
    [managingEditor]teacher_name@example.com[/managingEditor]
    [webMaster]webmaster_name_if_different@example.com - This line is optional[/webMaster]
  [item]
    [title>Title of Student-A's story or news shot[/title]
    [author]Student-A's Names[/author]
    [pubDate]Mon, 01 May 2006 09:39:21 GMT[/pubDate]
    [link]http://full_link_to_the_student's_news_shot[/link]
    [description]The student is going to write the summary/abstract of his/her story here. [/description]
  [/item]
  [item]
    [title>Title of Student-B's story or news shot[/title]
    [author]Student-B's Names[/author]
    [pubDate]Mon, 01 May 2006 09:39:21 GMT[/pubDate]
    [link]http://full_link_to_the_student-B's_news_shot[/link]
    [description]The student is going to write the summary/abstract of his/her story here. [/description]
  [/item]
[/channel]
[/rss]
```

The [item]s number will vary as per the number of students - each student's contribution is a separate [item] in the feed.

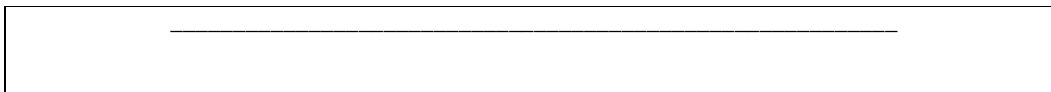
### Sample procedure

The teacher can open a few xml rss feeds in a browser to display the xml tags and should inform the students that this structure is a must. Otherwise the news aggregators/readers will not display the news stories properly. This can also serve as a 'bookmark' to mention writing conventions (in the offline world) without going too deep into them, and also a starting point for further work on writing conventions.

The teacher hands out worksheets ([worksheet1.pdf](#) – for young learners and low-level students; [worksheet2.pdf](#) – for higher-level students; or a worksheet with the xml tags) with description of what to fill between each tag; and asks students to compose their stories. Sample layouts of the worksheets can be as follows:

Worksheet1 - Young Learners and low-level students	
Title:	
Author:	
Date:	
Story:	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Worksheet2 – higher-level students	
Title:	
Author:	
Date:	
Summary/Abstract:	<hr/> <hr/>
Full story:	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>



When ready, the students turn to the computers and open the xml feed template in Notepad (prepared by the teacher beforehand). They type in their stories and save the files. These are collected by the teacher, checked and published. The students will subscribe to their own feeds, read each others stories and discuss whatever the teacher has instructed them to.

### **Variation**

You may wish to download some software for writing and publishing feeds. This will make it even easier for students to get used to the format, additionally reducing paper work. Besides, it will save the teacher's time compiling the feeds. A possibility is the Firefox browser plugin/extension *RSS Editor* (<http://rsseditor.mozdev.org/>) with which feeds are easily written, organised and published.

### **Timing, students' level and variations**

Such a writing class can take a period or two with low level students who may only write a news title and a news shot of about three to five sentences, while higher level students can develop summarising skills by writing summaries/abstracts. With more proficient students, the feeds may be full length stories; and classes can be extended to homework assignments over a few days.

The RSS feeds publishing is easy enough to implement in classes with young learners through to university students; group or whole class feeds; from beginner language students to non-language university or other courses.

Teachers have the freedom to choose one or a few tenses only for students to practise, for example, only will/going to; or only present perfect, or only past simple or all tenses studied, only passive voice, etc. The stories can all be on a single topic or students may write on a different topic for each RSS feed publication. The RSS feeds can be published to a class blog or the class/school website.

### **Follow-ups**

Follow-up classes and lessons spring up naturally since RSS feeds, by definition, are supposed to be updated frequently and regularly. Publishing RSS feeds can grow into a

long-term commitment of the class; and the feeds can be published to the class blog or the school website every couple of days or every week.

### **Conclusion**

RSS feeds with the clear XML structure provide a “nice and clean” framework for practising and teaching writing and writing conventions. It is amusing and students will love seeing a direct and quick result of their work. Subscribing to their own class’ RSS feeds and reading each others’ work is both stimulating and motivating to keep writing for a real audience; it allows for and can boost creativity and competition. The opportunities are open to both the teacher’s and students’ imagination and ingenuity.