



LINGUISTICS DEPARTMENT - STANFORD UNIVERSITY

An Invitation to CALL

Foundations of Computer-Assisted Language Learning

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An Invitation to CALL

Unit 4: CALL on the Web

OVERVIEW

We have been looking at CALL software and activities involving it regardless of whether it is accessible through disk, the Internet in general (like email) or the World Wide Web. This unit looks into the Web in more depth. The reason is that the Web represents the largest collection (by far!) of material that is accessible almost anytime and anywhere by almost anyone having a browser equipped computer and an Internet connection. The Web is also where you find the most common tool applications for CALL, in particular the browsers and online video players that give access to a seemingly endless collection of both dedicated and authentic English language material

Because of this, it is increasingly becoming the case that an expected competency for language teachers is an understanding of what the Web has to offer for language learning and how to use it is . The Web has been featured in many of the CALL articles and conference presentations since the mid 1990s, in particular practice-oriented ones. This is because it is constantly evolving, and, unlike disk-based tutorial software, often free and highly accessible to both students and teachers.

This unit is primarily about exploring, so follow up on links that look interesting. Note that this is just a start. Some of these sites will be discussed in greater detail in [Unit 5](#).

DISADVANTAGES OF THE WEB

Because of the hype surrounding it for language learning, it is useful to begin with some of the disadvantages of the Web over alternatives

- Text-based material on the Web is sometimes not as easy to read as material in paper format because of font color and background choices.
- Sound and video sometimes take a noticeable time to transfer, even on fast connections. Newer forms of streaming have improved this dramatically, but the Web is still not as responsive as a CD-ROM, DVD or the hard drive on a TiVo or other digital video recorder.
- Sound and video are typically compressed to speed up transfer: depending on the degree of compression and other factors they can be of noticeably lower quality than the original. This can affect their suitability for supporting language learning. Also some of the free material on sites like www.youtube.com were of poor audio or video quality even in their original state (for example, if taken with a mobile phone)
- Because of the way that HTTP (Hypertext Transfer Protocol) works, on most pages every click is a request that has to go back to the original server. The equivalent of turning a page may result in a noticeable delay if the server is busy.
- Because of this delay, interactivity is limited compared to what is possible with disks or CD-ROMs. However, increasingly Web applications (like Macromedia Flash) have interactivity without delays.
- Down servers or broken links may lead to frustration.
- The sheer amount of material can make it hard to find what you want, though developing skill with a search engine like [Google \(www.google.com\)](http://www.google.com) is certainly a great help. If you haven't already done so, have a look at Google's basic search help, www.google.com/support/websearch/bin/answer.py?answer=134479, and more search help, www.google.com/support/websearch/bin/answer.py?answer=136861.
- The Web is dynamic and often as unpredictable as the humans behind it. You may find an old site that has not been updated for years, or you may find a great source of material only to have it be gone the next time you look for it. You may still be able to locate old pages using the "cached" feature of [Google \(www.google.com\)](http://www.google.com) or the Internet archive's Wayback Machine at www.archive.org.
- Sites and applications that used to be free and only supported by text ads that could be easily ignored are increasingly charging fees requiring subscriptions (so that you don't get their ads), or requiring users to watch commercials before the desired material loads.
- As is widely known, the accuracy of Web sources is often questionable (the present one excepted of course). See, for example, http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials/2005-11-29-wikipedia-edit_x.htm.

ADVANTAGES OF THE WEB

Despite the disadvantages, there are many good reasons for using the Web for certain language learning activities.

- There *is* anytime, anywhere access (for some people at least).
- There are enormous amounts of free material.
- Material can be found that is current.

- Language reference and other learning support materials can be found.
- Student and teacher publication opportunities exist.
- A cultural window is opened through the authentic material readily available.
- Meaning technologies, such as transcripts, dictionaries, and translators, exist to aid comprehension of material.
- Increasing amounts of audio and video allow building of comprehension skills beyond reading.
- Previous disk-based activities (like tutorial exercises) and Internet-based activities (like email) can often be handled through the Web.

In the remainder of this unit, I will provide an overview of some of the uses the Web can be put to for language learning. Most of these are broad categories, and I encourage you to explore the ones you find most interesting in more detail.

Language support:

- [Scripts](http://www.script-o-rama.com/) from Script-o-rama (www.script-o-rama.com/) for movies and TV shows--great for building vocabulary of English in context.
- Student learning resources: [dictionaries](http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/links/ESL/Dictionaries_and_Reference_Materials/) (see http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/links/ESL/Dictionaries_and_Reference_Materials/) and other resources. Of particular value for ESL learners are learner's dictionaries, such as the [Longman's Dictionary of Contemporary English online](http://www.ldoceonline.com/): <http://www.ldoceonline.com/>.
- Automated meaning technologies: Machine translation, e.g. <http://babelfish.yahoo.com/> or www.google.com/language_tools?hl=en, and Hypertext systems linking to online dictionaries like [Voycabulary](http://www.voycabulary.com) (www.voycabulary.com). You can also link any web page you're viewing to a dictionary through the Firefox browser using [AnwerTips](http://www.answers.com/main/firefox_plugins.jsp): www.answers.com/main/firefox_plugins.jsp.

Authentic Language Materials. There are many, many options for this--here are just a few.

- General news sites such as [CNN](http://www.cnn.com) (www.cnn.com) and the [New York Times](http://www.nytimes.com) ([www.nytimes.com/](http://www.nytimes.com)) have rich Web presences. [The News Hour](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/media/) (www.pbs.org/newshour/media/) from PBS and [CNN Student News](http://www.cnn.com/studentnews/) (www.cnn.com/studentnews/) include scripts and audio or video together.
- Podcasts at www.podcast.com and many news and entertainment sites
- Online video banks: www.youtube.com <http://video.google.com>
- Google news: <http://news.google.com>. An excellent technique for more advanced students is to have them go to Google News for their own language, find an interesting and read it, and then follow up by reading three or more versions of the same story in English from different online sources.

Lesson Plans & Projects

- Finding content for projects, both individual and group. Note the importance of balancing seeking and production time with language learning and practice time. See http://iteslj.org/links/ESL/Student_Projects

- Ideas and lesson plans for Internet, Web, and class activities: Sources such as www.tefl.net/esl-lesson-plans/, <http://iteslj.org/Lessons/>. Better still, do a Google search!
- Making resource pages for specific classes. You can use FrontPage, Dreamweaver, or even MS_Word to produce Websites. See my Websites for [EFS 693B](http://www.stanford.edu/~efs/693b), <http://www.stanford.edu/~efs/693b> (Advanced Listening) for example. You can also make your own site easily, hosted by Google, at <http://pages.google.com/>.
- Sending your students out on [WebQuests](http://www.e4b.de/WebQuests/WebQuests.html): <http://www.e4b.de/WebQuests/WebQuests.html>
- Pages with annotated links for specific skills such as [listening](http://www.stanford.edu/~efs/tesol03listening) (www.stanford.edu/~efs/tesol03listening)

Dedicated Language Materials & Exercises

- Using tutorial software on the Web, like Randall's [Cyber Listening Lab](http://www.esl-lab.com/) (www.esl-lab.com/) and [English, baby!](http://www.englishbaby.com/) (www.englishbaby.com); see also [Unit 5](http://www.stanford.edu/~efs/callcourse/CALL5.htm) (www.stanford.edu/~efs/callcourse/CALL5.htm)
- ESL podcasts: www.eslpod.com/website/index.php#
- Commercial course sites like [Global English](http://www.globalenglish.com/) (www.globalenglish.com/), [Peak English](http://www.peakenglish.com/) (www.peakenglish.com/) and [Englishtown](http://www.englishtown.com/) (www.englishtown.com/)
- Major publishers increasingly have Websites that complement their textbooks, like [Longman](http://www.pearsonlongman.com/cws/) (www.pearsonlongman.com/cws/)
- Online learning communities and social networks, like www.livemocha.com and www.italki.com/.

Other Resources

- Online journals like [Language Learning and Technology](http://llt.msu.edu/) (<http://llt.msu.edu/>) and the [Internet TESL Journal](http://iteslj.org) (<http://iteslj.org>) have articles about using the Internet for teaching and learning, as well as other CALL fare.
- Some CALL experts have Websites with useful links: try [Vance Stevens](http://www.vancestevens.com/esl_home.htm) (http://www.vancestevens.com/esl_home.htm), [Claire Bradin Siskin](http://edvista.com/claire/) (<http://edvista.com/claire/>)

The key to using the Web is to be prepared. Know what the objective of your lesson is and try to make sure students are trained in what they need to know to accomplish that objective. Try to build some flexibility into the assignment or activity so that if something isn't working as expected it can still go on.

Here are a few tasks to help you connect the material here to your language teaching:

1. The Web can be a resource for both classroom and online lessons: take a look at two or three of the lesson plans on the Web (Use [Google](http://www.google.com) (www.google.com) to find "ESL lesson plans" if none of the sites above has what you're looking for). Do you think they represent activities that are consistent with your language teaching approach? Is there anything obvious you could do to improve them?

2. Meaning technologies like [Babylon \(www.babylon.com\)](http://www.babylon.com) and online scripts for audio and video can hinder as well as help, since they can interfere with normal language processing. What are some ways to use them positively and to train learners in their use?
3. Try three or four of the sites listed above that you haven't visited before. Note ways you might use them in current or future classes.
4. Increasingly, the term "Web 2.0" is appearing on the Web and elsewhere. What is Web 2.0? There are examples of it here, such as www.youtube.com. If you don't know what it is, go to a manifestation of it at www.wikipedia.org and look up the term. How do you think Web 2.0 is changing language teaching?

Last modified: February 4, 2010, by [Phil Hubbard](#)