

Online Tools for Language Teaching

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**** On the Internet ****

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Introduction

There are a large number of online tools that can be used for second/foreign language learning and teaching (Chapelle & Jamieson, 2008; Garrett, 2009; Godwin-Jones, 2009, 2010; Levy, 2009; Meskill & Anthony, 2010; Warschauer, 2010). The increasing awareness of the tools generates a need for computer-assisted language learning (CALL) researchers and practitioners to develop and implement CALL widely by exploring, selecting, using and evaluating the tools in a variety of contexts. In this paper, I discuss the place and role of online language teaching tools in CALL and present a categorised list of the tools, which provides a basis for further research and practice in CALL.

Language Teaching on the Internet

Internet-based language instruction (IBLI) can be defined as language teaching conducted on the Internet using Internet tools and resources (Son, 2004). In IBLI, computer-mediated communication (CMC) and Web-based language learning (WBLL) are two major topics, which have particularly attracted great attention among CALL researchers and practitioners. Chun's (2007) survey of two CALL journals (i.e., *CALICO Journal* and *Language Learning & Technology*) supports this point by revealing that the two most popular topics in the journals during the period 2001-2006 were CMC and Web-based instruction. My own studies also reflect a similar trend with focuses on the use of online discussion groups (Son, 2002), the evaluation of language learning websites (Son, 2005) and the use of WBLL activities (Son, 2007, 2008) and Web-based portfolios (Son, 2009).

It is evident that online tools play key roles in the implementation of CMC and WBLL. Out of the 23 articles published in the *Computer Assisted Language Learning* journal in 2009, 20 articles employ some kind of online tools and report studies related to the use of the tools. Also, one of the questions I receive most frequently as a CALL teacher educator from in-service and pre-service teachers is: "Is there any online tool for this

activity?” Consequently, I decided to make a list of online tools that are currently available and freely accessible on the Internet. My intention was to guide language teachers to explore those tools themselves and choose the right ones for their teaching purposes.

Types of Online Tools

The Online Tools for Language Teaching (OTLT) list presented below is a result of my own explorations, experiences and evaluations. During the process of information collection, interestingly, I discovered the Directory of Learning Tools (<http://c4lpt.co.uk/Directory/>), which provides a comprehensive list of tools for formal, personal, group and organisational learning, including general computer applications, standalone software programs and Internet tools. While the directory itself is an excellent database of learning tools, its extra wide coverage makes it difficult for language teachers to use their online time effectively in choosing particular tools with direct relevance for language teaching. In this respect, my OTLT list takes a different approach by addressing the needs of a specific group of professionals (i.e., language teachers) and focusing on Web-based tools that can be exploited for language learning and teaching purposes.

Based on their main functions and features, the online tools are classified into twelve categories: learning/content management systems; communication; live and virtual worlds; social networking and bookmarking; blogs and wikis; presentation; resource sharing; Website creation; Web exercise creation; Web search engines; dictionaries and concordancers; and utilities (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Categories of online tools for language teaching

Table 1 shows a selected number of online tools for each category.

1. **Learning/content management systems** (LMSs/CMSs) include Blackboard, Drupal, Joomla, Moodle and Sakai. Moodle, in particular, is a very popular free LMS adapted to online courses at many universities and schools.

2. **Communication** tools include Gmail, Skype, TokBox, Windows Live Messenger, Yahoo! Messenger, Jabberwacky, Verbot, MyBB, phpBB, Tangler and Voxopop. A good example of the communication tools is Skype, which is widely used for voice chatting and video conferencing.

3. **Live and virtual worlds** are used for delivering live meetings and virtual word communities. Elluminate, Livestream, OpenSimulator, ActiveWorlds, Second Life, Ustream, Wimba Classroom and WiZiQ belong to this category.
4. **Social networking and bookmarking** sites encompass Delicious, Diigo, Elgg, Facebook, Groupy, MySpace, Ning, SocialGo, LinkedIn, Twitter, Lang-8 and Livemocha.
5. **Blogs and wikis**, including Blogger, Edmodo, Edublogs, LiveJournal, WordPress.com, PBWorks, Wikispaces and Penzu, are collaboratively used in many language classes.
6. **Presentation** tools such as 280 Slides, Animoto, Empresser, Prezi, SlideRocket and Zoho Show offer innovative ways of presenting language-related materials.
7. **Resource sharing** tools are one of the most valuable tools on the Web. They encompass Google Docs, TitanPad, Zoho Writer, Box.net, Dropbox, VoiceThread, Xtranormal, Flickr, Picasa, MyPodcast, PodOmatic, Glogster, Screenr, Slideshare, PhotoPeach, Dipity, OurStory, Jing, SchoolTube, TeacherTube, VideoPress, Vimeo, WatchKnow and YouTube.
8. **Website creation** sites such as Google Sites, Jimdo, KompoZer, Mahara, Movable Type, SnapPages, Weebly, Webnode, Webs and Wix provide teachers and students with simple and easy ways to create their own Websites.
9. **Web exercise creation** tools such as ContentGenerator, SMILE, ESL Video, JCllic, Hot Potatoes, Quia, Lingt and Listen and Write enable teachers to create language exercises themselves.
10. **Web search engines** designed to search for information on the Web include Ask.com, Bing, Google and Yahoo! Search.
11. **Dictionaries and concordancers** are language reference tools, which include Dictionary.com, Merriam-Webster Online, YourDictionary.com, Compleat Lexical Tutor, Forvo, Howjsay, Visuwords, OneLook Dictionary Search and VLC Web Concordancer.
12. **Utilities** that can be useful for language learning activities include CalculateMe, CalendarFly, Doodle, ClustrMaps, Currency Converter, Dvolver Moviemaker, Google Earth, Lesson Writer, Storybird, Cacao, Mindmeister, Mindomo, Remember the milk, SurveyMonkey, Voki, Time and Date, TinyURL.com, W3C Link Checker, Wallwisher, Wayback Machine and Wordle.

The list (Table 1) is not exhaustive and can be modified and updated in line with changes to existing tools and developments of new tools. Also, there are tools that can be listed in more than one category due to their integrated features (e.g., Wimba classroom, Jing).

Table 1. Online Tools for Language Teaching

1. Learning/content management systems (LMS/CMS)		
Blackboard	http://www.blackboard.com/	Blackboard Inc.
Drupal	http://drupal.org/	Free open source
Joomla	http://www.joomla.org/	Free open source
Moodle	http://moodle.org/	Free open source
Sakai	http://sakaiproject.org/	Free open source
2. Communication		
Gmail	http://mail.google.com/	E-mail
Skype	http://www.skype.com/	Chats
TokBox	http://www.tokbox.com/	Chats
Windows Live Messenger	http://explore.live.com/windows-live-messenger	Chats
Yahoo! Messenger	http://messenger.yahoo.com/	Chats
Jabberwacky	http://www.jabberwacky.com/	Chatbot
Verbot	http://www.verbots.com/	Chatbot
MyBB	http://www.mybboard.net/	Forum
phpBB	http://www.phpbb.com/	Forum
Tangler	http://www.tangler.com/	Forum
Voxopop	http://voxopop.com/	Audio discussions
3. Live and Virtual Worlds		
Elluminate	http://www.illuminate.com/	Live e-learning
Livestream	http://www.livestream.com/	Streaming video
OpenSimulator	http://opensimulator.org/	3D application server
ActiveWorlds	http://www.activeworlds.com/	3D virtual world
Second Life	http://secondlife.com/	3D virtual world
Ustream	http://www.ustream.tv/	Live broadcast

Wimba Classroom	http://www.wimba.com/	Live teaching
WiZiQ	http://www.wiziq.com/	Virtual classroom
4. Social Networking and Bookmarking		
Delicious	http://delicious.com/	Social bookmarking
Diigo	http://www.diigo.com/	Social bookmarking
Elgg	http://elgg.org/	Social networking
Facebook	http://www.facebook.com/	Social networking
Grouply	http://www.grouply.com/	Social networking
MySpace	http://www.myspace.com/	Social networking
Ning	http://www.ning.com/	Social networking
SocialGo	http://www.socialgo.com/	Social networking
LinkedIn	http://www.linkedin.com/	Professional network
Twitter	http://twitter.com/	Information network
Lang-8	http://lang-8.com/	Language learning community
Livemocha	http://www.livemocha.com/	Language learning community
5. Blogs and Wikis		
Blogger	http://www.blogger.com/	Blog
Edmodo	http://www.edmodo.com/	Blog & wiki
Edublogs	http://edublogs.org/	Blog
LiveJournal	http://www.livejournal.com/	Blog & journal
WordPress.com	http://wordpress.com/	Blog
PBworks	http://pbworks.com/	Wiki
Wikispaces	http://www.wikispaces.com/	Wiki
Penzu	http://www.penzu.com/	Personal journal

6. Presentation		
280 Slides	http://280slides.com/	Multimedia
Animoto	http://animoto.com/	Video slideshows
Empressr	http://www.empressr.com/	Multimedia
Prezi	http://prezi.com/	Presentation editor
SlideRocket	http://www.sliderocket.com/	Creating and sharing
Zoho Show	http://show.zoho.com/	Creating and sharing
7. Resource Sharing		
Google Docs	http://docs.google.com/	Documents
TitanPad	http://titanpad.com/	Documents
Zoho Writer	http://writer.zoho.com/	Documents
Box.net	http://www.box.net/	Files
Dropbox	http://www.dropbox.com/	Files
VoiceThread	http://voicethread.com/	Group conversations
Xtranormal	http://www.xtranormal.com/	Movies
Flickr	http://www.flickr.com/	Photos
Picasa	http://picasa.google.com/	Photos
MyPodcast	http://www.mypodcast.com/	Podcasts
PodOmatic	http://www.podomatic.com/	Podcasts
Glogster	http://www.glogster.com/	Posters
Screenr	http://screenr.com/	Screencasts
Slideshare	http://www.slideshare.net/	Slides
PhotoPeach	http://photopeach.com/	Slideshows
Dipity	http://www.dipity.com/	Timelines and news
OurStory	http://www.ourstory.com/	Timelines and stories
Jing	http://www.techsmith.com/jing/	Visuals
SchoolTube	http://www.schooltube.com/	Videos
TeacherTube	http://www.teachertube.com/	Videos
VideoPress	http://videopress.com/	Videos
Vimeo	http://vimeo.com/	Videos
WatchKnow	http://www.watchknow.org/	Videos
YouTube	http://www.youtube.com/	Videos

8. Website Creation		
Google Sites	http://sites.google.com/	Pre-built templates
Jimdo	http://www.jimdo.com/	Website editor
KompoZer	http://kompozer.net/	Web authoring
Mahara	http://mahara.org/	E-portfolio system
Movable Type	http://www.movabletype.org/	Weblog management
SnapPages	http://www.snappages.com/	Drag-and-drop
Weebly	http://www.weebly.com/	Drag-and-drop
Webnode	http://www.webnode.com/	Website builder
Webs	http://www.webs.com/	Website builder
Wix	http://www.wix.com/	Flash Website
9. Web Exercise Creation		
ContentGenerator	http://www.contentgenerator.net/	Flash-based
SMILE	http://clear.msu.edu/teaching/online/mimea/smile/	Flash-based
ESL Video	http://eslvideo.com/	ESL video quizzes
JClic	http://clic.xtec.cat/en/jclic/	Java platform
Hot Potatoes	http://hotpot.uvic.ca/	JavaScript authoring
Quia	http://www.quia.com/	JavaScript authoring
Lingt	http://lingtlanguage.com/	Spoken exercises
Listen and Write	http://www.listen-and-write.com/	Dictation exercises
10. Web Search Engines		
Ask.com	http://www.ask.com/	Ask Jeeves
Bing	http://www.bing.com/	Decision engine
Google	http://www.google.com/	PageRank
Yahoo! Search	http://search.yahoo.com/	Yahoo! Slurp

11. Dictionaries and Concordancers		
Dictionary.com	http://www.dictionary.com/	Free online
Merriam-Webster Online	http://www.merriam-webster.com/	Free online
YourDictionary.com	http://www.yourdictionary.com/	Free online
Compleat Lexical Tutor	http://www.lextutor.ca/concordancers/	English and French
Forvo	http://www.forvo.com/	Pronunciation dictionary
Howjsay	http://www.howjsay.com/	English pronunciation
Visuwords	http://www.visuwords.com/	Graphical dictionary
OneLook Dictionary Search	http://www.onelook.com/	Dictionary search
VLC Web Concordancer	http://vlc.polyu.edu.hk/concordance/	Server-based
12. Utilities		
CalculateMe	http://www.calculateme.com/	Conversion utility
CalendarFly	http://www.calendarfly.com/	Free scheduling
Doodle	http://doodle.com/	Easy scheduling
ClustrMaps	http://www.clustrmaps.com/	Hit counter map
Currency Converter	http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/	Currency calculator
Dvolver Moviemaker	http://www.dvolver.com/moviemaker/	Animated cartoons
Google Earth	http://earth.google.com/	Virtual globe
Lesson Writer	http://www.lessonwriter.com/	Lesson plans
Storybird	http://storybird.com/	Collaborative storytelling
Cacoo	http://cacoo.com/	Collaborative diagramming
Mindmeister	http://www.mindmeister.com/	Mind mapping
Mindomo	http://www.mindomo.com/	Mind mapping
Remember the milk	http://www.rememberthemilk.com/	Task

		management
SurveyMonkey	http://www.surveymonkey.com/	Online survey
Voki	http://www.voki.com/	Speaking avatar
Time and Date	http://www.timeanddate.com/	Time zones
TinyURL.com	http://tinyurl.com/	URL shortening
W3C Link Checker	http://validator.w3.org/checklink/	Links and anchors
Wallwisher	http://www.wallwisher.com/	Sticky noticeboard
Wayback Machine	http://www.archive.org/web/web.php	Internet Archive
Wordle	http://www.wordle.net/	Word clouds
(Last updated: 25 May 2011)		

Source: (<http://www.usq.edu.au/users/sonjb/projects/tools/>)

Discussion

Related to the use of the online tools in CALL contexts, CALL research and practice can be initiated and improved by asking and answering the following 5W1H (who, when, where, what, why and how) questions. These elemental questions lead CALL researchers and practitioners to choose and test certain tools with clear aims and objectives.

- (1) Who uses it? – Learners? Teachers? Other users?
- (2) When do we use it? – Class time? Self-study time? Meeting time? Free time?
- (3) Where do we use it? – In the classroom? In self-access rooms? At home? Outdoor areas?
- (4) What do we do with it? – Reading? Writing? Listening? Speaking? Course management? Communication? Collaboration? Social networking? Resource sharing? Website creation? Web exercise creation? Web search? Entertainment?
- (5) Why do we use it? – To manage courses? To communicate with others? To collaborate with others? To experience virtual worlds? To share resources? To create Websites? To create Web exercises? To collect information and resources? To have fun? To make learning and teaching easier?
- (6) How do we use it? How does it work? – By contextualising? By creating learning spaces? By contacting others? By working with others? By exploring online communities? By sharing information and resources? By publishing Websites and Web exercises? By reflecting on learning and teaching? By developing

language learning activities? By integrating certain online activities into the curriculum?

In terms of facilitating the second language acquisition (SLA) process, Bush (2008) asserts that we need to find out “where and when during the SLA process each technique and tool can be applied to achieve maximum benefit” (p. 453). In a similar vein, Garrett (2009) states that “the availability of tools and resources that make possible student use of such aids does not guarantee that students will, in fact, use them in the way or to the extent that developers intend; only carefully structured assignments and follow-up work can effectively promote such use” (p. 722). She also says, “Being familiar with digital tools is not enough; students need guidelines on how to use them specifically for the purpose of acquiring greater language proficiency” (p. 730). This implies that teachers need to be knowledgeable and skilful enough to guide students when and how to use which tool for effective language learning. Best CALL activities are likely to be planned and conducted by competent teachers utilising online tools effectively and efficiently.

Conclusion

With the widespread use of the Internet, many online tools are increasingly available for use in educational and non-educational settings. Due to the abundance and sophisticated features of the tools, however, it is often difficult to select the right tools for specific purposes. In view of the need for CALL researchers and practitioners to find, choose, use and evaluate educational tools for further development and implementation of CALL, it should be meaningful to have a categorised list of selected tools that can be used for language learning and teaching. With this in mind, I have created and presented the OTLT list showing examples of such tools divided into twelve categories.

In this paper, I have stressed the need to use online tools purposefully. It is suggested that the OTLT list should be updated regularly while reflecting continuous changes and new developments. It should be also valuable to incorporate an evaluation system into the list so that teachers can make evaluative judgements of the tools and share their experiences of using the tools in and beyond the classroom. I conclude this paper by saying that, along with the expansion of CALL, research and practice should be constantly encouraged to improve our understanding of theoretical, pedagogical and technical aspects of the use of the tools in various contexts.

Note

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