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Sulantra

Title	Sulantra (http://en.sulantra.com/)
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Contact Information	info@sulantra.com
Type of product	Website for learning survival English or one of several other languages
Platform	Web
Minimum hardware requirements	A computer with Internet access, a browser, and speakers (or headphones).
System/software requirements	Operating System: OS X 10.3.9 for Macintosh Computers, Windows® XP, or Vista for PC-Compatible Computers Web Browser: Safari®, Firefox® or Internet Explorer® Plug-ins: Adobe® Reader, Adobe® Flash Player, and Java™ 1
Price	<p>Starter Course (Free)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 Compulsory Functions • No Optional Functions • 5 Levels • 3-5 hours of study <p>Basic Course (\$10)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 Compulsory Functions • 10 Optional Functions • 5 Levels • 30-70 hours of study <p>Expanded Course (\$20)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 Compulsory Functions • 10 Optional Functions • 6 Levels • 100+ hours of study

General Description

Sulantra (<http://sulantra.com>) is a language learning website that acquaints learners with the very basics of the language in order to communicate basic needs (e.g., asking for directions, buying food). It specifically targets beginning learners who would like to master basic communicative skills, which are needed for interaction with native speakers in various contexts. As the number of people travelling around the world increases, the need for effective language learning tools also grows. Sulantra is one of the recently designed websites that aims to provide learners with survival English to succeed in their short-term interactions in a foreign setting. According to Nation and Crabbe (1991), initial communication and social interaction are complex processes in nature, and both involve daunting challenges, thus language should be presented to the communicative-oriented learners differently than it is presented to the learners in a regular classroom context. The specific purpose of the website is to function as a tool to address survival language needs. On the other hand, the website can serve as supplementary material for a language classroom considering that it involves language items frequently used in ESL and other target language settings.

Currently, the website is readily available online, and it offers three levels for language learning – *Starter Course*, *Basic Course*, and *Expanded Course*. The initial level of language learning with this website – the Starter Course – can be accessed for free and it demonstrates the basic features of the website, while the upper two levels require payment for the registration.

The website is built around functions such as meeting people, shopping, directions, and public transportation with a focus on meaning rather than structure of language. The functions are sequenced based on their usefulness to the learners. The Starter Course involves 3 to 5 hours instruction on the functions of meeting people and communication in a restaurant. The Basic Course is composed of 30 to 70 hours of instruction, while the Expanded Course requires users to get instruction for more than 100 hours. There are 7 core and 11 elective functional areas covered in Basic and Extended tracts, which provide learners with choices according to their needs and interests. Each function within the offered levels is presented in 5 stages, which vary in degree of difficulty and elaboration. Each stage involves several repetitions, helpful images, and drills. Functions are mostly used in oral communication, thus they are especially effective for improving speaking and listening skills, which are essential for survival in a foreign language setting.

Sulantra's home page (Figure 1) indicates what languages are currently available for study. It is worth mentioning that the presented languages can serve both as the target languages and the tools for instruction per se. For instance, if the learner's native language is German and he or she wants to study Chinese, the learner can easily choose German as the language of instruction and thus avoiding the necessity to use English as a tool.



Figure 1. *Sulantra main menu*

After choosing the target language, and language of instruction (Step 1), learners need to choose the desired level of study (Step 2), as demonstrated in Figure 2. Further, users can familiarize themselves with the language functions to be covered (Step 3).



Figure 2. *Choosing the course and level*

Next, the website provides helpful guidelines that will help learners navigate the website more successfully and make a better use of it. Specifically, the website developers present learners with some tips about how to make language learning with this tool more efficient and how to fit it into learners' schedules. Also, at this step various icons and symbols frequently used on the website are introduced and explained (Figure 3).

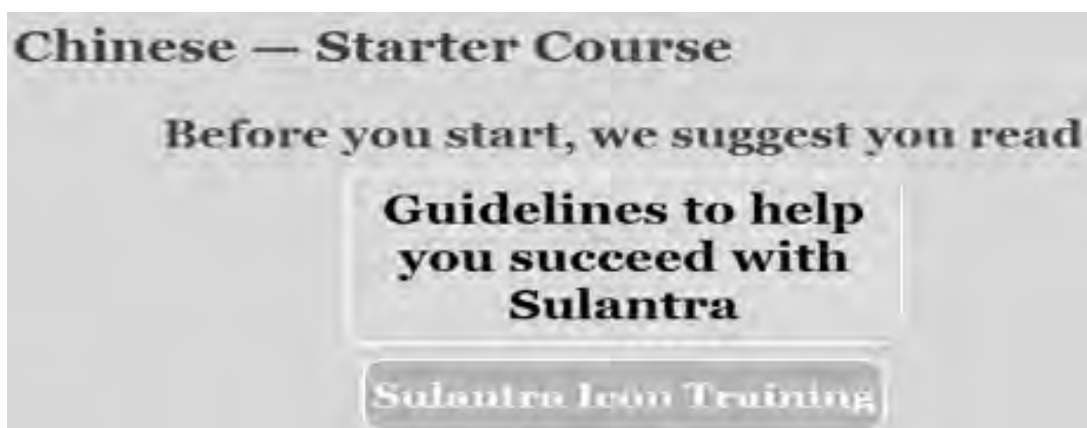


Figure 3. Navigation and study tutorial

Having familiarized themselves with the main characteristics of the website, the learners are presented with the list of topics or functions that will be covered in different units. After that, the learning starts when learners get introduced to the first expressions, and have to use them to complete different tasks. More specifically, the learning of every set of expressions proceeds in three distinct stages: *Stage 1* – introduction of a target phrase accompanied by a picture where learners need to develop initial associations between the expression and the picture; *Stage 2* – the necessary picture is highlighted again and learners have an opportunity to listen to the expression as many times as they want, and, finally, *Stage 3* – identification of what learners hear with the corresponding picture. An example of *Stage 1* is presented in Figure 4.

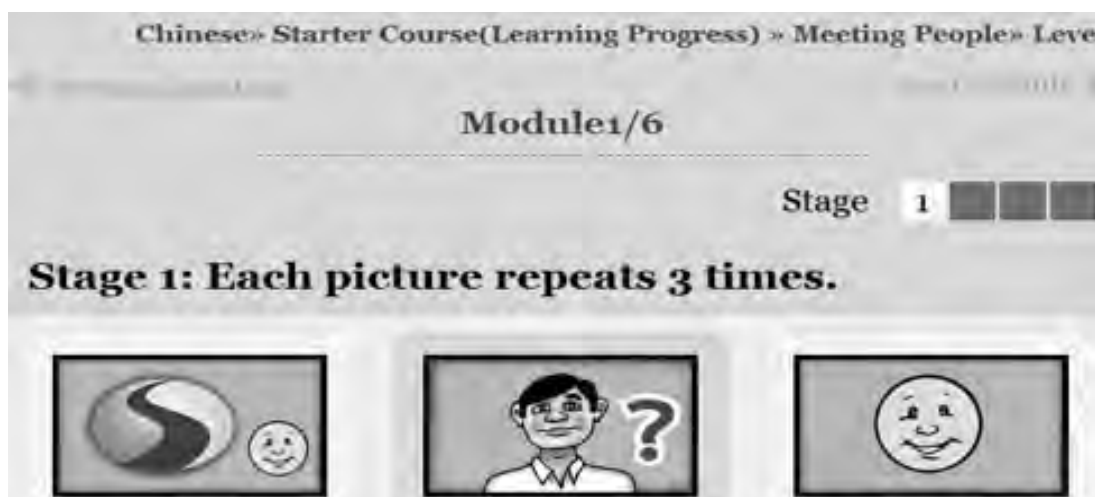


Figure 4. Association of the target phrase with the picture

After completing these three stages, the learners are introduced to a new set of phrases and pictures that they have to learn. Interestingly, the website provides different types of pictures – from cartoon-like to real photos which brings some variation in the presentation.

Website Evaluation

Sulantra appears to be a useful language learning tool for those who are interested in developing initial communication skills on the survival level. Thus, the website introduces a wide range of phrases that are necessary for functioning in the target context, and it does not overwhelm learners with unnecessary and unrelated information about the language grammar. This characteristic of the website is originated from a formulaic language teaching approach, which focuses on introduction of language chunks rather than discrete components. This perspective is supported by the literature. For example, Wood (2009) states that formulaic language teaching fosters fluency that helps effective communication.

Also, one of the main advantages of the website is its use of authentic pronunciation provided by native speakers of the target languages. According to Chun (2002), it is essential for the adult learners to become familiar with suprasegmental features of the target language. Although Sulantra does not come with any explicit pronunciation instruction, it still makes it possible for the learners to be exposed to authentic speech samples at the discourse level.

Along with the words, expressions and language related tips, cultural information is also presented for the learners of each specific language. The website mainly focusses on survival language needed by travellers around the world; however, it is crucial for L2 learners to understand socio-cultural norms and rules in order to gain the ability to use language appropriately in a variety of social contexts (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972). In order to achieve this, learners are presented with cultural tips required for basic communication in target language context. For example, learners know how to greet people when they first meet or how to ask for directions.

The website also includes directions with the aim of lowering the affective filter of the learners (Krashen, 1985). Reminders such as *Don't panic – language is recycled* are helpful to decrease the anxiety and self-doubt which might interfere with the process of language learning.

The website is a well-designed language learning tool itself. Unlimited and slow repetition is a possibility for learners who need extra practice. The use of authentic pictures, animations and icons makes it fun for the learners to navigate.

Nevertheless, navigation is a bit complicated at the first stage. Repetitions and slower-speed are enabled through icons. *Icon Use Tutorial* helps prepare learners for navigation. Also there is another tutorial titled *How to Use This Page* which gives training about how to add or drop functions to design a new language course, and explain strategies to review words and phrases.

Lack of speech recognition is a disadvantage of the website. The learners can repeat the expressions and learn how to use them, but they do not get any feedback when they produce the language. Another disadvantage can include the absence of written forms of the expressions. Especially visual learners can benefit from reading the vocabulary and chunks on the screen simultaneously.

Conclusion

In sum, Sulantra could easily be adopted by those who strive to learn survival English, Chinese, Spanish, Turkish, or Japanese in a short time period for communicative purposes. There is no focus on complicated grammatical structures and/or language skills other than speaking and listening. As previously mentioned, the website is very straightforward when the language aims of interaction and language processing considered. Navigation tools and tutorials could use some revision, however.

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