LLTI Highlights

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Welcome to LLTI-Highlights. Until now, this column was written faithfully by our new IALLT president, David Pankratz. It is my privilege to continue with this column, which features a selection of important electronic discussions from the LLTI—Language Learning and Technology International—listserver. The discussions have been summarized and paraphrased by me. Each topic presented in this column has a reference number, which has been assigned by Otmar Foelsche, the moderator of the electronic discussion list. This number can be used to search the LLTI archives. Instructions on searching these archives appear at the end of this column.

Digitizing Audio

The first important discussion of the year focused on "Digitizing audio" (# 5897). Denise Hamwey initiated the exchange of information in January with the following question: "Is .rm the best format in which to save materials? I just tried recording a song onto my PC, and the file was quite large (5mb)." She received several responses to her inquiry that explained the different formats for digital audio files and their use for "serving" or "streaming" digital audio.

Otmar Foelsche: "Digital audio files (and video files) should be produced in a format that is compatible with all platforms, can be "http served," can be "streamed" and can be converted into future file formats without great trouble and without losing quality.... Passive listening is best accomplished with streaming (also very kind to the network bandwidth—but its delivery to the client is delayed by five to ten seconds). Interactive applications require "served"— immediate, without delay—delivery to the client. Additional considerations are the price and compatibility of streaming servers. Our solution here at Dartmouth has been QuickTime (free clients for Macs and PCs) the QuickTime with off-the-shelf equipment and SoundEdit Software...."

Leslie Harris had the following advice: "The 'best' format actually depends on how your audience will access the

digital files. If you are in a lab that is networked to a server, and if your network speeds are pretty good, then MP3 will probably work very well for you. MP3 files are about 1/10 the size of the WAV or RM files, so the resulting MP3 version will be a much smaller file and a very fast download from the server. The quality of the MP3 file is also excellent, despite the compression. There are a bunch of free programs that allow you to convert between file formats (for example, WAV to MP3), and my recollection is that RealProducer should allow you to convert from RM to WAV, since it certainly does the opposite direction. Otherwise, you can digitize the clip into WAV format to start with, and then convert to other formats from there. MusicMatch Jukebox (free download from http://www.musicmatch.com) is one converter that I have used in the past. If your students will be accessing the files from home, via a dial-up connection, then streaming audio is crucial, and RM will be a good format. For an oral history site that was a class project, we ended up using both: MP3 format for those with fast connections, and RealMedia format for slower connections.... We did the original audio capture on a Macintosh using SoundEdit 16."

Karl Fisher had similar suggestions: "MP3 is the best compressed audio format. One should capture sound as WAVE files at 44 kHz with no compression and then convert them to MP3. You don't save much disk space by decreasing the sampling rate or compressing before converting, but you lose sound quality. (I am using SoundEdit 16 for capturing and SoundJam for compression, both for Mac. There are similar solutions for PC.)."

Otmar Foelsche explained his reason for choosing QuickTime for digital audio: "It may sound as if I have been pushing QuickTime a little bit too hard. But, since QuickTime is not a file format but a container for various file formats it appears to be the most flexible container in an environment that dictates compatibility with various platforms and various playback devices. We have been using Cleaner 5 to do batch processing for video as well as audio files. We can move complete archives of materials from MP3 formats into hinted .mov files and vice versa. Our archived files are hinted .mov files that can be mounted on a streaming server and that can be mounted on standard file servers - compatible with MediaPlayer on the PC and MoviePlayer on PCs as well as Macs."

On Copyright Issues and Web Access of Audio Materials Accompanying Textbooks

Discussions about the use of digital audio materials for foreign language teaching and learning go hand in hand with the consideration of copyright issues and the idea of sharing already digitized materials. This was also true for the April discussion "On copyright issues and Web access of Audio materials accompanying textbooks" (#6062), started by Rachel Saury's question: "To date, the language laboratory at UVA only allows access to the audio materials accompanying foreign language textbooks on site in the Lab. This is largely due to copyright and licensing agreements we have with publishers. We would like to make some of these materials over the Web. We are wondering what your experiences have been with this and what types of agreements you have made with publishers." The ensuing discussion quickly turned from acquiring permissions to digitize specific materials to the idea of disseminating them.

Cindy Jorth: "I have been able to gain permission to digitize and place the audio in a password protected environment online. The password-protected part has been the big selling point in gaining this permission."

Marianne Crusius: "We have been doing this for two to three years now (95% of our audio materials are online) and I have encountered few problems in obtaining rights from the publishers. I believe the most important restriction is that these files can only be accessed in the Princeton domain. Publishers also often stipulate that files have to be removed when the textbook is no longer used at the University."

Susan Breeyear: "We have digitized quite a few of the audio tapes that accompany texts used by our foreign language departments. I have had very little trouble getting permission from U.S. publishers, and a lot of them even have a Web site with a form you can use, but we had to pay a $500 royalty to a Chinese publisher for the right to digitize audio material. All of the digitized material has to be password protected and removed after the text is no longer being used."

This discussion took a different turn with Jonathan Perkin's inquiry concerning the sharing of digitized audio materials: "Would anyone be interested in setting up some kind of exchange of digitized audio materials so as to save the overall amount of work for each institution? We have just begun our digitizing effort and have Nakama (both books)

and Deutsch Na Klar up in MP3 format on a password-protected site. Any exchange would, of course, require proof of all the necessary permissions from the publisher."

Read Gilgen: "There is growing interest in this. Bruno Browning will be conducting a session at IALL 2001 to explore the nuts and bolts of setting up a shared distribution of digitized materials so we don't have to replicate each other's digitizing efforts. It is session number 290. The title of the session is ' Distributed Archiving of Digitized Materials."

Bruno Browning: "I will be proposing/discussing such a thing at IALL next month... and am especially pleased to hear this expression of interest as we could probably use those Deutsch Na Klar files."

Ed Dente: "I have digitized Nakama, and Fuentes but not the German material. I am digitizing into RealMedia, putting it on a RealAudio Server, and making the material available through Course Info (Blackboard) under Course Documents as streaming audio. This neatly solves the copyright restrictions problem as only those who are enrolled in the class can access the Course Info/Blackboard page...."

Philippe Delcloque : "There appears to be significant interest in asset sharing. This is an implicit goal too in the DISSEMINATE project and has been in others. Although, it may not please publishers too much, it would, in my view, not threaten commercial publications and the benefit for digital language learning production and prototyping could be immense. At the moment, the DISSEMINATE project is progressing slowly (but surely) until we are able to secure significant funding which we are working on. If members of this list would be interested in forming 'an asset sharing association', (perhaps someone could volunteer to direct this effort), we would certainly be very happy to promote it from the DISSEMINATE web site (http://www.disseminate.org.uk). There are good models elsewhere, for instant Linux efforts and the Linguistic Data Consortium."

Beth Secrist : "Just adding to the 'YES, WE NEED THIS!' We too are making a major move to provide access to digital files for all the materials publishers will allow us to digitize. Some are problematic. For example, we use Parliamo Italiano and there is no audio-CD for this title. I know it is

often necessary to further break down sections to facilitate working with exercises, etc. This is very labor intensive! I am looking forward to seeing how we can collaborate on this."

Composition Software for Spanish and French

Grading foreign language compositions requires more than just spell checking software. Fatima Chajia launched the discussion on Composition Software for Spanish and French (#5951) in February 2001 with the following question: "Has any one found a good software that helps to edit and provide feedback on students' compositions in French and in Spanish? This would be particularly important in a composition class that involves editing from the professor, rewriting from the students (using the professor's feedback and editing) etc...." She received recommendation and critiques for software that may or may not be useful for editing student compositions. Here are some excerpts of the discussion:

Jack Burston: "For composition annotation, I'd suggest having a look at Markin 2.1. There's a review of an earlier version of it on the CALICO Web site (http://astro.temple.edu/~jburston/CALICO/review/markin.htm). Markin is an inexpensive shareware program ($30), a demo version of which can be downloaded from the following Web site: http://www.cict.co.uk/software/markin/index.htm. The program is highly configurable, but doesn't contain any on-line dictionaries or grammar checker. For grammar checking in French, you can use Antidote, Le Correcteur 101, or the French Proofing Tool in the Windows version of Word. There is a Spanish grammar checker, called El Correcteur, but it is not nearly as good as its French counterpart...."

Tom Browne: "Try Sans-Faute for French from McGraw-Hill. It has spell and grammar checking and provides a dictionary as well."

Jonathan Perkins: "We are using Commonspace (from Sixth Floor Media, which can be found at http://www.sixthfloor.com) in English, German, Spanish and Italian.... The program is excellent for peer editing and teacher correction in that it works using separate side-by-side columns and thus multiple drafts (and comments) can be viewed simultaneously. It comes with a spell checker and also an easy to use chat program that supports all Latin based languages.... There are some minor glitches we have

noticed... but the students really like it."

Kirk Anderson: "We purchased the then-current version of Le Correcteur 101 a couple of years ago and it didn't fit our needs very well. The difference between what a native French speaker needs and what an English-speaking student learning French needs came into sharp focus as we used this software. Le Correcteur was very clearly designed with the former group in mind."

Course Management Software

Karl Fisher began the May discussion on Course Management Software (#6117) with the following request: "We are evaluating three course management packages for possible implementation next year. They are WebCT, Prometheus, and Blackboard. Has anyone used these products? What are your reactions? How is the FL support?"

The responses favored either Blackboard or WebCT and focused on personal experiences with these course management tools, evaluations, ratings and pricing of the software.

Marty DeWindt : "We are in our third quarter of evaluating WebCT, Blackboard and now Jenzabar's IMS (which is comparable) and Campus Cruiser. We have a German professor that is using Blackboard.... We are using these products as enhancements to in-class teaching.... Blackboard is easier than Web CT to get typical faculty up and going. Both products are now priced about the same. Jenzabar's IMS is an immature product. Campus Cruiser is really a portal with a wonderful calendar (best of the bunch) that works well for a student to manage tasks and assignments...."

Laura Atkinson: "I create WebCT courses for the entire College of Arts and Sciences, and I am quite pleased with WebCT. The one complaint I have is that the process of uploading and then editing files is still fairly tedious...."

Jack Burston: "A comprehensive comparative evaluation of Blackboard and Web-CT, which focuses particularly on their use in foreign language instruction, will be appearing in a Software Report in the forthcoming volume of the CALICO Journal."

Fernando Larios: "Here, at the University of Georgia they use the WebCT. It is more than a management program. I have

used it myself for my Spanish language courses. I could not teach now without it. I give it a TEN."

Álvaro_González: "I have used each Blackboard and WebCT for one semester and have been favorably impressed with WebCT, especially for use with upper-level classes. The discussion boards were a real boon for my Spanish literature class. Over the summer I am planning to implement WebCT pages for first-year language classes especially to serve digitized audio materials. It is a minor quibble, but I would like it better if I were to be able to have all buttons available in the respective languages...."

Paul Chapin: "We went with Blackboard over WebCT largely because we believe it is easier for the faculty to use and understand. The only major problems we have seen is the process by which a faculty member can add a student to a course - it's awkward and confusing and can result in a student being in the student data base multiple times ... The bottom line is that a lot of our faculty use and like Blackboard. Most are not doing anything very exciting; mostly they are posting documents, using the mail lists and perhaps the discussion boards. Only a few are really trying to do anything very original. I have actually taken a course using Prometheus. As a student it didn't strike me much one way or the other—except that I liked the look of Blackboard better and I didn't like how it presented threaded discussions.... There was a new version of Prometheus coming out even as I took the class, but I didn't see any great advantage and decided to stick with what I knew rather than change in mid-semester. I don't know what the current version is like. Also, Prometheus was quite a bit more expensive that BlackBoard and WebCT. In the case of BlackBoard, they are clearly trying to sell you some of their higher levels—it comes in three different levels— and may be low-balling the basic price to get you to sign on to their product line. We were told that there was very little profit in the basic level. Prometheus may only have one level making such pricing tactics unavailable."

Firewire Necessary for DV Camera?

Mary Ball started the June Discussion (#6171) Firewire necessary for DV camera?:"We are considering buying a digital video camera. A number of the web pages I have read mention using Firewire connections between the camera and the computer. That makes sense. However, we don't have any Firewire-equipped computers. Question: Is a firewire

connection necessary? It is the way to transfer a couple minutes of video from camera to computer...?" The respondents were quick to explain the functionality and the advantages of this technology tool.

Otmar Foelsche: "Firewire allows you to send the DV signal directly into the computer if it is equipped with a firewire input and the appropriate software and hardware that can handle it. Firewire boards are available as PCI boards for Macs and PCs often in combination with USB. If the camcorder converts the DV signal to analog (you use the special cable from camcorder that provides stereo sound and video via RCA plugs) you can still get fairly good video depending on your video processing software and hardware on your computer."

Laura Atkinson: "We purchased a Firewire card for connecting our Sony digital camera to a PC from: http://shop2.outpost.com/product/71991.... It works great, and can be used with other equipment as well although we have not yet done so. There are cheaper ways to go, but the loss of quality and amount of time you would spend getting it to work make it pointless to try anything else."

Derek Roff: "If you want to bring digital video information directly into the computer for editing, FireWire (officially, IEEE-1394) is the only affordable option. Adding a FireWire card to your computer costs around $100.... If you want to bring analog video information into the computer, then you need a card in your computer which will accept analog video, and convert it to digital. Your digital camcorder will have analog video output. Your computer will probably not have analog video inputs, unless it is a mid-nineties model Mac or you previously purchased and installed a video digitizing card in your computer. A low end video digitizing card will cost at least $100 .... As you can imagine, the quality lost in converting digital video to analog in the camcorder, and then converting it back to digital in the computer is significant. Since the cost of adding FireWire is so low, and the quality and ease of use is so much higher than analog, I would go with FireWire every time."

Gary Dauphin (Apple): "Firewire is the only correct way to get digital video in and out of the computer and camera. There are technically other ways, but they are so unfeasible, I would not even begin to explain how to do it. You can buy a Firewire card for a PCI Mac or a Windows PC at a reasonable

price. The catch is the quality of the software you get for editing the video."

David Herren: "Firewire is not (just) a cable, it is a high speed data bus... The whole point of buying a digital camera is to facilitate moving the digital video directly into the computer without a double conversion and resulting loss of quality. Furthermore, using Firewire, you can dump vast quantities of video at MUCH higher speed than an analog capture with NO loss of quality."

Samantha Earp: "If you do have Firewire capabilities, an alternative way to get analog input (audio or video) into your computer is to buy a device like the Sony Media Converter. You plug the cables from the analog sources into the converter, which then sends a signal out to your computer's Firewire port. This is how our multimedia development stations are set up and it works beautifully. The only problem is that some software programs (such as RealProducer Plus) do not work with Firewire input. But the major audio and video editing programs such as SoundForge, Edit DV, Premiere, etc. all accept Firewire input."

Language Learning and Technology International Listserver Archives

The discussions of the Language Learning and Technology International (LLTI) listserver have been archived and posted on the web. These LLTI archives can be accessed from the IALLT Home page, which is located at http://www.iall.net/. A link to the LLTI Listserver appears at the top level of the IALLT Home page. The LLTI listserver page gives instructions on how to subscribe or unsubscribe to the listserver. In addition, there is a link to the LLTI archives. These archives can also be accessed at http://listserv.dartmouth.edu/archives/llti.html.

To search the archives, type the subject in the first search field. The search engine will match the subject with the subject headings of the archived messages. You may also type a key word or words in the second search field. This search will look for the key words in the body text of all messages. It the reference number that has been assigned to a discussion topic is entered in this field, the search will bring up a complete list of all discussions dealing with the topic. You may also want to restrict search by limiting it to a specific author or by entering beginning and ending dates. Such a restriction is particularly useful for searches on

frequently occurring topics.

Any questions or comments related to the LLTI listserver may be addressed to Otmar Foelsche, the moderator of the LLTI discussion list. Otmar can be contacted at otmar.foelsche@dartmouth.edu. ◆

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