



The IALLT Journal

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FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR OF THE IALLT JOURNAL



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Guiding the Language Learning Technology Narrative

I am very pleased to introduce the latest volume of the *IALLT Journal for Language Learning Technologies*. The Spring Issue of Volume 41 marks the return of the Journal following a brief period of restructuring that has allowed a comprehensive transition into an online open-access format—while still maintaining a print publication for individuals and institutions—and integration within the new IALLT.org website. These developments are important not only in their movement towards a more accessible and technologically relevant iteration of the Journal, but also in their greater integration and cohesion with the *International Association for Language Learning Technologies* as an organization and a community of researchers, practitioners and learners.

Such a community of applied scholarship is needed now more than ever. As Mike Ledgerwood notes in his own contribution to the introduction of this Volume, we are witnessing ever increasing pressures on language learning centers and support units within the current budgetary climate. Over the past two years, the field of foreign language education has seen the closure of or disinvestment in dozens of language programs and language learning units/centers around the country. At the same time, many of our colleagues have encountered growing calls for evidence of efficacy in their work. These calls are often predicated upon a poorly understood and patently superficial knowledge of the language acquisition process in general and the role for pedagogically directed technologies—within classrooms and language centers/labs—in particular. What is perhaps most striking about this rhetoric is its origin from within institutions of learning that espouse not only the importance of a humanities-driven liberal arts education, but the need for greater internationalization with vague references to ‘global citizenship.’

Clearly, one cannot provide such quality liberal education and international perspective without excellent and effective foreign language programs. In order to achieve the former, it is imperative that one consider the complexities of the latter. And while academic publications interested in the study of language acquisition and the pedagogies which drive it are perhaps legion, the IALLT Journal is ideally situated to address the praxiological importance of technology in these endeavors; and at a time when technological interventions are increasingly salient because of their potential cost and [classroom] time saving benefits. This is an opportune time for the IALLT Journal to play a more robust and public role in the direction of effective and substantive approaches to language learning technology that emphasize the essential and preeminent role of expert faculty and support staff in directing language technology tools appropriately in order to achieve efficacy.

As we know, learning a foreign language as an adult is a complex developmental process that draws upon a host of cognitive, psychological and articulatory mechanisms. These mechanisms are, in turn, influenced and co-opted by a variety of personal and environmental factors that can only be interpreted and appropriately addressed by trained professionals in the field of second language acquisition and/or foreign language pedagogy. Thus, for instance, within most disciplines, errors are scrupulously avoided and, when they do appear, addressed through correction and remediation. Yet, among foreign language pedagogues, errors are understood to be a natural [and indeed vital] process of linguistic development and addressed through various tacit strategies intended to push learners to the next ‘stage’ of linguistic development for each form. Such corrective feedback requires specialized training and [often technological] tools that cannot be addressed by general educational resources or self-directed language learning technologies alone.

Moreover, while other disciplines seek to catalyze only intellectual development, language educators must simultaneously develop both declarative

knowledge (information & understanding) alongside procedural knowledge (articulatory execution/production). Foreign language learning has often been analogized with the development of musical proficiency in popular literature—in that they represent both intellectual knowledge sets and skill sets, respectively. While the similarities are only superficial, they do provide an illustrative example of the complexity of language acquisition in that the declarative knowledge of musical development (notes, scales, tempo, etc) are not both the object and the medium of study, as they are in language learning. That is, in the case of the violin player, he need not use music in order to articulate and understand its component parts. For the language learner, however, he *must* use language in order to even reference its parts and such language use (i.e. procedural knowledge) becomes, increasingly at higher levels of proficiency, the only means of advancing his linguistic and sociocultural understanding (declarative knowledge).

In order to develop these knowledge sets in tandem, the second language acquisition process draws upon a dynamic system of hypothesis testing combined with structured interaction—allowing procedural gains to drive declarative gains, and vice-versa. We call this process the *negotiation of meaning*, and while it can occur naturalistically, it is a terribly slow and formally deficient process for adult learners without pedagogically structured practice. Indeed, much of second language acquisition research over the past decade has focused on the primacy of appropriately structured opportunities to negotiate meaning via language, and much of this has been advocated via technology mediated formats. Thus, it is imperative that learners are provided with opportunities to practice their foreign languages outside of their limited class time and that there be opportunities for them to receive appropriate corrective feedback via carefully situated and structure technological tools.

The language center/lab is an ideal means of accomplishing this [and more]. Indeed, examining the historical development of the language center, its role as a decisive factor in the development of substantive foreign language acquisition is quite compelling:

During the Second World War, and the Cold War era that followed, the American military was dismayed to find that most post-secondary foreign language graduates were unable to actually use their language for any communicative purpose. Indeed, such learners had significant declarative knowledge about the language (vocabulary, morphology, grammar, etc), but they could do very little with it—outside of maintaining a passive reading knowledge. With an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the language learning process, and a recognition of the important role for significant, structured practice outside of classes, the National Defense Education Act of 1958 provided a glut of funding for academic institutions to develop the first language labs, precursors to the modern language center. These labs, and the centers which followed, provided a key development to existing foreign language curricula by providing structured opportunities for foreign language practice and corrective feedback while also exploiting the latest

technological innovations to maximize efficacy and efficiency. Accordingly, these labs and centers are credited [in part] with the enormous qualitative and quantitative gains that the field has seen in language proficiency since the late-1960's. (See IALLT's upcoming *Language Center Design* volume for a more detailed account of the historical trajectory of language centers)

While the development of language labs and centers recognized the importance of establishing post-secondary units (beyond the foreign language classroom) as a means of providing expertly guided practice and feedback, they also signaled a move towards technological tools that greatly facilitated such practice and feedback. Language labs were the first academic units, for example, to employ voice recording and playback technology as a pedagogical tool—and one specific to language acquisition. Today's language centers and language technologists continue this tradition by exploiting the latest computer-mediated technologies to advance language learning. The vast majority of these extent technologies, alongside a host of emerging technologies, require specialized training to employ for language learning. The rationale for the initial language labs as technologically-enhanced units with pedagogical expertise in language acquisition remains as relevant today as it was in 1958. Indeed, given our globalized economy and growing calls to internationalize undergraduate curricula, this rationale is all the more compelling in a contemporary context.

Another important, albeit secondary, reason to maintain language centers and technology supported language learning is the community (real and/or virtual) it provides among foreign language learners. Here again, it is important to emphasize the uniqueness of the language learning enterprise. While students of other academic disciplines can negotiate their content via a language that allows them to express and maintain their identities with facility, the foreign language student must negotiate their content with great difficulty of expression and thus maintenance of their selves/egos. One of the profound values of foreign language study is the awareness that comes of one's culturally manufactured self, as one must contend with a wholly different means of expressing and conceiving identity. And although this is an extremely valuable learning process, it is also an exceedingly uncomfortable and anxiety ridden one. Asking students to make unusual sounds and communicate in broken words and phrases is not an easy request. Asking students to do so in a classroom or a general public space outside of class is much harder. The language center and online [collaborative] tools provide a home to such psychologically difficult practice. They provide a normalizing space for students to become comfortable with this difficult process of communicative language development; while providing structure and accountability for such language practice. Though this may seem somewhat trivial to institutional administrators, we know that it is not. Motivation is, of course, the highest correlate for any measure of academic success. Asking students to practice their developing foreign language skills outside of class and in general purpose academic space is sure to raise anxiety significantly and suppress motivation to learn in a directly inverse manner. Thus, the

need for language centers and virtual spaces that can provide these vital opportunities for structured language practice is again emphasized.

For these reasons, and many more, it is vital that our organization and this publication take a leading role in guiding national and local narratives of what constitutes feasible and effective language learning via technology. The praxiological and practitioner-focused orientation of the IALLT Journal provides an ideal platform from which to provide some leadership in this regard. Researching, documenting and articulating studies of real technologies being put into real use in the language learning enterprise provide a compelling counterpoint to the often *ad hoc* and intuitive approach with which many institutions have approached language learning technology initiatives. The present Volume provides an excellent series of examples of precisely these types of compelling and informative case studies:

- In the first article of the present Volume, Nathan T. Carr, Kyle Crocco, Janet L. Eyring and Juan Carlos Gallego give us a careful and much needed examination of the efficacy of technology enhanced language learning overall alongside some very nuanced findings and suggested implications.
- María Isabel Charle Poza provides a detailed analysis of the use of WIMBA for asynchronous voice conferencing, and its ability to minimize anxiety to the benefit of the language learner.
- Daniel A. Castaneda, Terence C. Ahern and Sebastián R. Díaz provide a comprehensive case study of the effects of blogs and wikis for the teaching and learning of the preterite and imperfect aspects in college-level Spanish courses.
- Ulf Schuetze also investigates the pedagogical efficacy of wikis albeit for their broader potential to inform grammatical development in writing and within a German language course.
- Agnieszka Palalas documents a fascinating and unique case study of a blended learning environment for advanced students of English that incorporated face-to-face coursework with online and mobile language learning components.
- Lunden MacDonald contributes a more detailed written version of her IALLT 2009 Henderson Plenary in which she describes the form and function of a virtual language lab and the opportunities this approach can afford.
- Min Jung Jee reviews the growing field of mobile assisted language learning and offers some important insights for theory and practice.

From the Managing Editor

- Finally, Trip Kirkpatrick provides a wonderful iteration of the newly resurrected *Language Technology Review* by introducing the emerging technology of augmented reality and highlighting its potential and burgeoning applications to language acquisition.

Taken together, these contributions provide a poignant instantiation of the importance of applied research in the field of language learning technology and the potential for such work to influence and guide the policy at the institutional, national and international level. I hope that you will help me and my editorial colleagues continue to provide a forum for such scholarship by considering a submission of your own work in this area. Please refer to the Journal section of the www.iallt.org website to learn more about submission criteria and procedures. We look forward to working with and learning from you.

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Secretary of the International Association for Language Learning Technology***

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