

## **How can technology be used to contribute to the effectiveness of language teaching/learning?**

Whether you are aware of it or not, there is something of a revolution going on in language learning. While its full effects are yet to be seen, the link between technology and language learning is developing at an ever increasing speed.

### Simple websites

At the most simplistic end of the technological spectrum are now a range of websites that help students linguistically in a range of areas, the most popular being English grammar and vocabulary. Here is a popular example:



<http://www.ego4u.com/>

These may be used to complement traditional learning in the classroom or be undertaken by a student independently who perceives that they have a weakness in a particular area.

### More developed websites

More sophisticated sites take an integrated approach to skill sets. At the **BBC Words in the News** site:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/wordsinthenews/>

Students can read and listen to a short current news item. There are also some pre-taught words to view. All that is missing from this input is something to activate student 'output'; in other words a way for the student to activate the words and phrases introduced both explicitly and implicitly. As a language teacher, you could do this through an active practice activity, such as a discussion, for example.

So on a site like this, the teacher is still necessary to facilitate some meaningful practice tasks and as such, it could be argued that this is where technology is at its best, when blended with teacher-led output.

### Sites with interactive technology

Some of the most fascinating new developments in language learning and technology allow for much more interactivity. With the advent of greater broadband speeds and easier access to the internet, this is an area already in strong growth and set to get even more popular.

Blogs, forums and social media sites, such as Twitter or Facebook, provide an ideal space to meet, connect and use English outside of the formal classroom. Many language schools now have their own Facebook pages, blogs and forums to encourage student to organisation communication.

Learners who wish to speak to a teacher can call for free anywhere in the world if both have Skype or similar VOIP internet phone. This has led to some innovative sites where language learners can communicate on a language exchange basis or browse for registered teachers and then pay for lessons with the teacher of their choice.

There are a few companies offering such options but we are going to focus on one of the biggest by way of example: [www.myngle.com](http://www.myngle.com)



Lessons by Skype are supported by a 'virtual classroom', so students can see and hear their teacher and interact with learning materials. You can see a very short video clip showing what this looks like in practice here:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRPIZ\\_K1q38&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRPIZ_K1q38&feature=related)

At the time of writing, Myngle state they teach 45 languages and over 218 teachers – but if you're thinking of joining them, be aware that they say they have a waiting list of over 1000 teachers.

Live Mocha [www.livemocha.com](http://www.livemocha.com) is a more organised online language learning community which offers free and paid language courses and boasts '9 million members from 195 countries around the world.'

However, Skype offers additional features that the teacher can use to support mainly oral/aural lessons. As well as free telephone calls, Skype also provides an instant messenger system so words and phrases can be sent between teacher and student instantly, which is particularly useful for error correction. Broadband speed permitting, you can also see each other while you talk if you have a webcam and Skype's conferencing facility also allows others to join the call. All for free! Here is a brief summary of the features and benefits of Skype for language learning:

<http://www.onlinetutoringworld.com/technology/teflskype.htm>



You can also customise the teaching experience by adopting extra Skype plug-ins, such as an interactive whiteboard:

<https://extras.skype.com/1137/view>



He makes a distinction between people who use the web as a tool as the need arises (i.e. 'a visitor') and those who live a percentage of their lives online through social media etc. and see it partly as a place 'to live' (and are 'a resident'). He says this is an important distinction to make when considering how we expect students to interact with their school or teacher throughout their course of study and beyond.

White argues that if the students are mainly 'visitors', they are unlikely to take advantage of any social media/blog functions. The 'resident' will expect such a facility and may create one if one is not officially provided. He comments:

*'We offered membership of a Facebook group to our students as they left their online courses. The majority signed up without question, as they wanted to stay in touch with fellow students and continue discussions. The remainder saw the group as pointless and a possible invasion of privacy.'*

This suggests that while technological advances are bound to continue, the speed with which new technology is embraced by the learning community as a whole may largely depend on idiosyncratic user preference.

We look to the future with interest!



## **Conclusion**

As you will have seen from just the 2 areas that we have looked at, there is a lot of excitement surrounding the field of Applied Linguistics. We think you will find the history interesting and the application even more so. There is considerable room for further study as well, so we recommend you spend some time in the further research section below.

Additionally, you will find that one of the dissertation questions is set in this field, so if it is something you would like to take further, you will have the opportunity to do so at that point.