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Recommended website

El Camino de Santiago Localización y movimiento, causa y finalidad, características y estados

<http://camino.ccdmd.qc.ca>

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Produced by *Cégep du Vieux-Montréal* with technical and financial support from the *Centre collégial de développement de matériel didactique* (CCDMD) of Quebec's Ministry of Education. Author: Matilde Asencio, with the collaboration of Annie Desnoyers.



The screenshot shows the homepage of the website 'El Camino de Santiago'. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the following menu items: 'Portada', 'Observación y aprendizaje', 'Introducción al Camino', 'Hacer el Camino', 'Gramática', 'Cultura', 'Progresión', and 'Acerca de este sitio'. The main content area features the title 'El Camino de Santiago' and a description: 'Ser, estar, en, a, por, para Identificación, definición, descripción, localización, desplazamiento, causa y finalidad Nivel A1-A2 del MCER'. Below this, there is a section for 'Español lengua extranjera' with a description of the resource: 'Recorrido del Camino de Santiago a través de 46 ejercicios de lengua sobre tradiciones y leyendas, encuentros con gente del Camino, aspectos prácticos de la peregrinación...'. There is also a section for 'Ficheros de gramática, cultura y progresión del estudiante'. A video player is embedded in the center, showing a large yellow arrow on a blue background. The video player has a play button and a progress bar. At the bottom of the page, there is a copyright notice: '© Centre collégial de développement de matériel didactique, 2012'.

Figure 1. Homepage.

El Camino de Santiago is an enrichment resource for ELE (Spanish as a Foreign Language) corresponding to levels A1 and A2 of the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages).

A virtual journey through the most famous pilgrimage route of the Spanish speaking world, it facilitates the practice of oral comprehension, reading comprehension, written expression as well as of some elements of grammar that are difficult for students of Spanish at the Basic User level. This website is also useful for expanding vocabulary and cultural knowledge.

1. Content

1.1 Grammar

- *En, a por, para* + place complement: location and movement.
- *Por, para*: cause and purpose.
- *Ser, estar*: identification, definition and location.
- *Ser, estar* + adjective: characteristics and states.

1.2 Culture and Vocabulary

The cultural content includes legends, traditions, characters from folklore, art, history, as well as esoteric and practical aspects of the Camino de Santiago.

Work on those themes implies the use of a vocabulary very different from the one usually found in level A1 and A2 textbooks, where the language refers to everyday life and the student's immediate environment. But this possible difficulty is compensated by the fact that because of its attractiveness and the interest that it awakens, *El Camino de Santiago* will motivate students. In any case, the vocabulary used is relatively simple and, when difficult words occur, when you run the mouse over them, a definition or a synonym appears. Furthermore, terms related to the Camino have links to a glossary. For example:

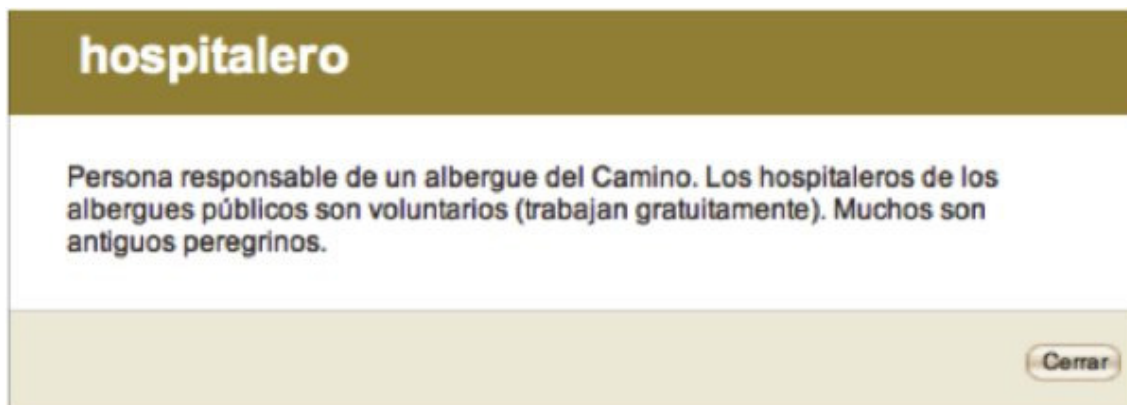


Figure 2. Sample glossary entry.

Several exercises involve choosing options that are not only grammatically correct but also true. Of course, most students will not have sufficient cultural knowledge about the Camino to know the real answer but this doesn't matter: you choose an answer as you do in a guessing game and you learn the missing information with the feedback. This way, the playful aspect of the riddle and, most of all, the centering of attention on form and content at once, make the use of the language significant. Naturally, in the *Progresión del estudiante* (record of the work done) section, only linguistic errors are counted, not the cultural ones.

We would like to point out that culture is present everywhere, as much in the content of the exercises as in the grammar explanations, which contributes to consolidate significantly the learning of the language.

Many exercises are based on authentic materials: pilgrims' diaries and blogs, fragments of novels, a poster, a tag, messages left along the Camino... For example:

MENSAJES //
comprensión lectora
Desplaza al pie de los mensajes las expresiones que corresponden a su significado.

Inma, somos las niñas malagueñas. No sé si te veremos. Mi email es: vira@hotmail.com Besos	Estamos en la ermita de los deseos. Mi deseo se va cumpliendo día a día, adelantando kilómetros y profundizando en mi corazón y en mí misma.	Que tengáis buen Camino. Con cariño. Marisol

Expresiones
Comunicación, contacto
Expresión de buenos deseos
Transformación personal

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Figure 3. Sample exercise based on authentic materials.

In the case of a text that has been adapted, at the end of the exercise access is given to the original text, as in the exercise *Dormir en Grañón*:

DORMIR EN GRAÑÓN /
ser / estar
Haz clic en los huecos y escoge una opción.

El primer pueblo que sigue a Santo Domingo de la Calzada **es** Grañón. Aquí tenemos la impresión de **estar en otra época**: calles silenciosas, no circulan coches... ¡todo como en los tiempos de la peregrinación medieval!

El albergue **es** agradable, pero **está** demasiado lleno. Los peregrinos que no tenemos plaza **estamos** encantados porque vamos a dormir en la iglesia, mirando de frente a su magnífico altar del siglo XVI.

Adaptado del diario del peregrino Salvador Miranda : <<http://www.interam.com/camino/index.htm>>.

[Leer el texto original y otros](#)
[Ver un vídeo](#)

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Figure 4. Adapted text.



Figure 5. Original text.

Since the cultural content of this website is Spain, the language used is Spanish from Spain.

2. Content Organization

2.1 Grammar Explanations

Grammar explanations are presented in a clear and accessible language. They are presented in two ways: as multimedia animations in the *Observación y aprendizaje* section and in an identical or extended printable version in the *Gramática* file.

Let's see an example of grammar animation:



Media file 1. Video sequence explaining the difference between *Por* and *Para* (<http://camino.ccdmd.qc.ca/#section5>). Click on the image to watch the video.

2.2 Exercises

There are a total of 48 exercises. They are divided into two levels:

Level *Introducción al Camino*

It consists of 7 very easy grammar exercises. You practice location with *en*, location with *estar*, purpose with *para*, *ser* + noun and *ser* + adjective that classifies or adjective indicating an inherent characteristic. At this level vocabulary and elements of geography are introduced to orient the student in the context of the Camino.

Level *Hacer el Camino*

It contains 41 exercises couched in the metaphor of a virtual 790 km journey taking the *Camino Francés*, from Roncesvalles to Santiago de Compostela, a route that is prolonged to Finisterre. The "student-pilgrim" advances through 400 images of the itinerary. The captions under the photos feature numerous uses of the grammar elements studied in this material. Occasionally the student is encouraged to do an exercise related to the place visited.

There are three types of exercise in Level *Hacer el Camino*:

1. Reading comprehension

Authentic texts and slideshows on cultural themes. For example:

INTERNET ???
comprensión lectora

1. Lee el texto.
2. Selecciona las tres opciones correctas.

Adaptado de la página del peregrino Rodrigo Núñez.

Una de las cosas más bonitas del Camino es que, con tu mochila a la espalda, eres simplemente un peregrino. No importa la edad, el sexo, la ideología, la procedencia... Caminas, comes, cenas, duermes y te duchas con peregrinos venidos de todas partes del mundo. Y no necesitas saber idiomas, porque todo el mundo hace esfuerzos para comunicarse.

Aprendes a prestar atención a muchas cosas que habitualmente no observas. Por ejemplo, el ruido del agua de los ríos se transforma en sonido, y es como la banda sonora del paisaje por el que caminas.

La experiencia no es la misma para cada persona, pero todos los que van al Camino vuelven a casa con algo nuevo en sus vidas.

Naturaleza Relación social Transformación personal

Rodrigo habla de:
Deporte

Bien. 2 / 3
Continuar el ejercicio

Figure 6. Use of authentic texts.

2. Oral comprehension

Interviews with pilgrims and people of the Camino. The student's perception is aimed at partial comprehension: it's about understanding the essential or the meaning of what they're saying, not understanding everything. Let's hear the beginning of the exercise *Experiencias*:

<http://camino.ccdmd.qc.ca/quiz/quiz-web/9-experiencias-Web/main.html>

The interviews with pilgrims and people of the Camino appear fragmented in the oral comprehension exercises, but the integral version of six of them is accessible in the *Acerca de este sitio* menu's *Lista de vídeos*. The complete interviews can be used by teachers to develop free practice activities. The video *El albergue de Grañón*, accessible at the end of the exercise *Dormir en Grañón* can be used for the same purpose.

3. Grammar

The points of grammar are always practiced in context. Attention is focused on form and meaning at the same time.

The difficulty and the complexity of Level *Hacer el Camino* (difficulty caused by vocabulary or by grammar rules) increases progressively along the journey. Half way through the route, in some exercises several points of grammar are combined. The degree of difficulty is indicated with an icon of one, two or three pilgrim's staffs.

At the end of exercises on the Camino's legends and traditions you can listen to the text read by actors. Let's hear an example:



LEYENDA DE FELICIA Y GUILLÉN
en, estar
Haz clic en los huecos y escoge la opción verdadera (que es la opción correcta gramaticalmente).



Pintura murada en el templo de Ansoagü, Navarra.

Felicia y Guillén son hermanos. Son todos y muy ricos. Felicia es muy religiosa y hace la peregrinación a **Santiago**. Como consecuencia de su viaje, dedica su vida al servicio de los pobres. Su hermano **está** furioso por esta decisión. Guillén es celoso y, en un acceso de cólera, asesina a Felicia.

Al poco tiempo, Guillén se arrepiente de su crimen. Está muy afligido y para pedir perdón, va en peregrinación a **Santiago**. A continuación, se mata en Debañe y allí hace penitencia el resto de su vida.

Escuchar la leyenda

Media file 2. Sample audio file: *Leyenda de Felicia y Guillén*.
Click on the image to listen to the sound file.

Feedback on the student's answers (correct as well as incorrect) includes an explanation. In exercises where one writes a verb, the student receives personalized feedback: a variety of possible feedback has been foreseen to allow for the correction of the student's concrete answer, since errors of various types (spelling, lexical, morphological, syntactic or combinations thereof) may be present. Clues are given to the student to actively look for the right answer. And after four unsuccessful attempts, the answer is given to enable the student to continue the exercise. Let's see an example of personalized feedback in which the student's answer contains two errors, one syntactic (agreement) and one lexical (verb *estar*):

MILAGRO DEL GALLO Y LA GALLINA //
ser, estar
Completa las frases con los verbos *ser* y *estar* en presente. Pulsa ENTER.



á é í ñ ó ú

Tres peregrinos (padre, madre y un hijo adolescente) van a Compostela. Está alemanes.

Dos errores: 1. el sujeto es tres peregrinos; 2. El adjetivo de nacionalidad (alemanes) clasifica a las personas en grupos: los alemanes / los españoles... 1 / 9

Figure 7. Feedback.

2.3 Culture

It includes three printable files: *Mapa*, *Cronología* and *Glosario* (explanation of terms related to the Camino).

2.4 Student's Progress

In this file the exercises done and the exercises completed without making any mistake are tabulated. If the student has registered in *Iniciar sesión*, the results of successive working periods accumulate and they can be printed.

For the exercises of *Hacer el Camino*, the file *Progresión* represent metaphorically a *Credencial* (pilgrim's "passport" that indicates the places visited) and, therefore, when an exercise is completed, the stamp that shows the passage through the corresponding place of the itinerary appears:

Caminar: 39 ejercicios			
	Número de veces terminado (con algún error)	Número de veces terminado sin haber cometido ningún error	Sellos
La Misra del Peregrino ser, estar	0	2	
De qué países son los peregrinos comprensión auditiva	1	1	
Leyenda de las doncellas guerreras en, a: lugar	1	1	
Un póster ser	0	3	
Gráfico por, para: causa y finalidad	0	3	
Postales ser, estar	0	2	
Leyenda de la fuente y el diablo ser, estar	0	1	
Ulgera en, a: lugar	1	2	
Leyenda de Felcia y Guillén ser, estar	0	1	
La Virgen del Izorri ser, estar	0	1	
Enfermedades del peregrino por, para: causa y finalidad	1	0	

Figure 8. Learner progress.

3. Navigating the site

Navigation is totally free and doesn't favor any particular type of learning (by rules or by practical exercises). All explanations and exercises are immediately available.

In the section *Hacer el Camino*, students, like the real pilgrims, can start their journey at different points of the itinerary. These exercises can be accessed in two ways:

From the virtual route:

Go to the *Hacer el Camino* menu, pick *Caminar* and start the journey from the beginning or click on one of the names of the itinerary's cities and towns that appear in the picture below, on the left. Along the way, exercises (marked with an icon of the scallop shell) are offered to the student who always has the option of stopping to do them or continuing on the route.

From a list:

Go to the *Acerca de este sitio* menu and click on *Lista de ejercicios*.

You can choose according to the order it appears along the Camino or according to a grammar theme. The oral comprehension exercises are also accessible on the same menu by clicking on *Lista de vídeos*.

4. Suggestions for use to learn grammar

El Camino de Santiago is an enrichment resource that can be used for self-learning and in class.

4.1 Self-Learning

Students wishing to study grammar rules before applying them can first view an animation of the *Observación y aprendizaje* section, consult the section corresponding to this animation in the *Gramática* file and, then, pick the exercises of the grammar point studied in the *Lista de ejercicios* of the *Acerca de este sitio* menu.

Students preferring to discover the rules by themselves can do the exercises and see their answers confirmed or corrected with the feedback.

4.2 In class use

In the classroom, grammar rules can be presented to the group with the animations of *Observación y aprendizaje*.

Exercises where content options are selected by guessing which are the true ones (*Leyenda de Felicia y Guillén*, *La Virgen del txori*, *El Camino esotérico*, *Dormir en Grañón*, *Peligros de la peregrinación medieval*, *El estilo románico*, *Leyenda de la mula*, *Pinturas románicas* and *Leyenda de Virila*) can be done collectively in class by having the group vote. In the case of the three legends mentioned and of *Dormir en Grañón*, students should be made aware of the fact that it is possible to guess the true answer by paying attention to grammatical correctness.

All exercises can be assigned as homework to be done in the lab or at home.

To conclude, we would like to point out that access to the site of *El Camino de Santiago* is free of charge.

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Recommended software

Learning verb inflection using Cilenis conjugators

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1. Introduction

It is well-known that the complexity of verb inflection in Romance languages is much higher than in English. While an English verb is, at most, associated to three forms, the inflection of a single verb in Spanish or Portuguese can take up to 70 or 80 different inflected forms (without including composite forms). Verb morphology is then perceived as one of the most important acquisition challenges for L2 learners of Romance languages. So, it is important to provide learners with appropriate linguistic tools. Automatic verb conjugators are seen as very useful tools to help L2 learners acquiring verb inflexion. They can be accessed using many types of devices: computers, tablets, smartphones, etc. Verb conjugators take part of a vast variety of language-learning tools, including dictionaries, translators, or multimedia resources, available in real time on the Internet. Learners receive powerful reinforcement by searching for relevant linguistic information at any time and in any place.

In this article, we describe a linguistic tool, named Cilenis Verb Conjugator, consisting of three related modules: *Cilenis Conjuga*, which is a verb conjugator for Spanish, *Cilenis Conjugador*, a verb conjugator for Portuguese, and *Cilenis Conxugador*, a verb conjugator for Galician language. These three modules allow us to conjugate Spanish, Portuguese, and Galician verb infinitives, respectively. They are ideal for L2 learners as well as for those students completing high school and college class assignments. The main properties of our three verb conjugators are the following:

- They are based on highly reliable linguistic information.
- They were developed within an open source project.
- They are accessed via search forms with user-friendly interfaces.
- They can be installed on Android for smart phones.

2. The strategy

Our linguistic tool was built on the basis of a free software project. The start point of this project was the study, analysis, and improvement of three existing free conjugators:

- The Spanish verb conjugator developed by the research group "Gramática del Español", at University of Santiago de Compostela.
- The Portuguese conjugator, called Conjugue, written by Ricardo Ueda Karpischek with Awk. This tool was designed to inflect all verb forms contained in the Ispell dictionary.
- The Galician verb conjugator, called Conshuga, wich is a Perl script developed by the research team "ProLNat", at the University of Santiago de Compostela.

In order to accomplish the project's requirements, we performed two tasks: a linguistic improvement of the existing tools, and a computational unification of the three conjugators into one single architecture.

First, the linguistic task mainly consisted of identifying and correcting grammatical and lexical errors found in the three conjugators, as well as in adding missing irregular verbs. Besides, we also added new items of information, namely the association of different forms to the same verb inflection, as well as the insertion of different conjugations to ambiguous verbs with the same infinitive form; for instance, "acostar" in Spanish or "cumprir" in Portuguese. Concerning defective verbs, we made an important effort to unify the different, and sometimes controversial, criteria used by the authors of the three conjugators. Finally, special attention was paid to the language varieties in Portuguese. To deal with spelling variation in this language, we defined four different cases:

- European Portuguese before the requirement of the Spelling Agreement ("Acordo Ortográfico" of 1990).
- European Portuguese filling the requirements of the Spelling Agreement.
- Brazilian Portuguese before the requirements of the Spelling Agreement.
- Brazilian Portuguese filling the requirements of the Spelling Agreement.

Second, the computational task consisted of building a single framework containing the linguistic data of the three existing conjugators. For this purpose, we defined a set of scripts transforming the different outputs of these conjugators into a single output format. This new unified output is the input of the visual modules used to develop the search interfaces in both the Web and Android environments.

The three modules of the Cilenis Conjugador framework are also open-source and freely available from their corresponding Web pages. This will allow other researchers or companies, not only to install and use the conjugators in their own environments, but also to improve the software and /or enrich the linguistic information it contains. By now and as far as we know, one company has took advantage of our open source project: the company GalApps has made use of our Galician module to implement an application for both smart phones with Android and.

3. The search interfaces

Two different types of search interfaces were implemented: Web forms written with HTML and PHP, and Android applications implemented with JAVA. The Android interfaces rely on APIs to search and retrieve results from the Web forms. We paid special attention to the design of the interfaces, by making them attractive, simple, and user-friendly (Figures 1-6).



Figure 1. Web form of the Spanish verb conjugator.

Também para Android  | Sobre Cilenis Conjugador | Código Fonte | Conjugador para Galego Espanhol

CilenisConjugador™

teimar Port. Brasileiro Conjugar

Acordo Ortográfico
 Conjugar só verbos conhecidos

Conjugação do verbo: teimar
Português Brasileiro depois do Acordo Ortográfico

Formas Nominais	Infinitivo	Gerúndio	Particípio
	teimar	teimando	teimado
	Presente do Indicativo	Pretérito Perfeito do Indicativo	Pretérito Imperfeito do Indicativo

Figure 2. Web form of the Portuguese verb conjugator.

Tamén para Android  e iOS  | Sobre Cilenis Conxugador | Conxugador para Portugués Español

CilenisConxugador™

Introduza un infinitivo Conxugar

Conxugar só verbos presentes no VOLG

O verbo cumprir ten dous significados:

1. Realizar, levar a cabo [o que se debe, o que corresponde ou está ordenado]. Ex: "Cumprir o seu deber". **Ver**
2. Ser necesaria ou conveniente [a cousa que se expresa]. Ex: "Cómpreche facelo". **Ver**

Significado 1 (verbo cumprir):
(Realizar, levar a cabo [o que se debe, o que corresponde ou está ordenado]. Ex: "Cumprir o seu deber".)

Infinitivo	Gerúndio	Participio
------------	----------	------------

Figure 3. Web form of the Spanish verb conjugator.



Figure 4. Android app of the Spanish verb conjugator.



Figure 5. Android app of the Portuguese verb conjugator.

Among the different elements and functionalities including in our search interfaces, we outline the following:

- The search/conjugate button and the text box, which are obviously shared by all existing verb conjugators. The user must type the verb infinitive she/he wishes to conjugate into the text box, and then press in the search button.

- Given a specific language, the system is able to identify and conjugate only existing verbs, that is, known verbs that are in the main dictionaries of that language. In order to search for just existing verbs, the user must mark with a cross the corresponding square boxes.
- On the contrary, if the user does not cross the box of existing verbs, the system may conjugate imaginary or wrongly spelt verbs, if their ending corresponds to an existing conjugation model. The Spanish conjugator, *Onoma*, also provides this and the previous functionality (Rello & Basterrechea, 2011).
- As it was stated before, the Portuguese module allows the user to search for four different language varieties. To choose a specific variety, the user must cross or not the square box with the label "Acordo Ortográfico (*Spell Agreement*), and select between "Port. Europeu" (European Portuguese) and "Port. Brasileiro" (Brazilian Portuguese).
- Finally, when the user type an ambiguous verb infinitive, the system shows the different lexical units associated to that verb (see again Figure 3 above). Each lexical unit gives a different verb inflection.

4. Query analysis

To analyse the behaviour of the users of our three verb conjugators, we have stored all queries made so far in log files. These log files provide us with useful information to improve the system. For instance, as they allow us to observe what the most searched verbs are, it is possible to revise and correct errors which are potentially very dangerous. Besides, these files allows us to check if the users take advantage of all elements and functionalities of the conjugators, for instance if they search for only existing verbs or not.

Below, Table 1 shows useful information about the number of total search queries, unique users, and the top 20 lists with the most searched verbs. The queries made from the Web forms have been set apart from those made from Android devices, except for Galician, since we have not developed the corresponding Android version. The number of total and unique users clearly shows that there are much more queries made using Android devices than those made using the Web applications. This is in accordance with the fact that the use of smart phones and tablets is still growing while the laptop and PCs sales are reported to be in slightly decline. Notice also that the number of total users for Galician verbs is much higher than for Spanish and Portuguese, even if the number of unique users is clearly lower. It means Galician users are more persevering: they make about 20 queries per unique user, compared to not more than 3 or 4 queries per user in Portuguese and Spanish. The adhesion and loyalty of Galician users are probably due to the fact that, unlike for Portuguese and Spanish, there are very few alternatives to our conjugator in Galician.

Besides, Table 1 also shows that most of the top 20 searched verbs have irregular forms, even if some representative regular verbs (e.g. *comer* - *to eat*, *cantar* - *to sing*) also appear on the top of the lists. As it was expected, irregular verbs are more troublesome and annoying for both native and second language learners.

Total users				
PT Web	PT Android	ES Web	ES Android	GL
12417	42775	2195	33292	105533
Unique users				
PT Web	PT Android	ES Web	ES Android	GL
2804	16664	673	7850	6823
Top search verbs				
PT Web	PT Android	ES Web	Es Android	GL
487 fazer	3189 comer	141 clipsetar	1211 ir	1369 ir
405 ver	1701 ir	108 comer	1211 comer	1264 ser
373 ser	1463 ser	67 mentar	1068 ser	1188 poder
339 ter	1376 ver	61 ser	1047 hacer	1069 vir
324 ir	1362 fazer	53 oir	917 tener	1067 ver
317 vir	1193 vir	51 ir	837 estar	1008 ter
296 poder	1029 ter	38 hacer	678 decir	938 dar
232 estar	872 estar	37 haber	665 ver	854 estar
229 dizer	872 amar	35 estar	601 poder	833 facer
183 amar	815 falar	34 pitufar	521 poner	705 haber
153 querer	694 poder	32 tener	520 saber	683 decir
152 saber	645 dar	32 bailar	520 dar	609 saber
150 por	635 querer	31 poder	504 haber	560 caber
148 haver	618 haver	30 dar	487 venir	530 seguir
147 comer	574 trazer	28 ver	470 querer	517 ler
145 dar	492 andar	28 saber	430 salir	510 querer
138 gostar	478 dizer	26 venir	403 traer	510 andar
121 trazer	439 cantar	26 cantar	390 hablar	479 comer
120 falar	433 correr	24 poner	361 leer	470 poñer
112 ler	428 saber	22 querer	348 dormir	458 falar

Table 1: Log information on search queries made from both the Web application and Android devices.

5. Related work

There are many verb conjugators for Spanish and Portuguese, but not for Galician. For Portuguese we found:

- Conjugador Insite
- Conjugador Só Português
- Verbix for Portuguese
- bab.la for Portuguese
- Conjuga-me
- Verbomatic
- Flip

Flip and Cilenis Conjugador are the only conjugators offering the four varieties of Portuguese (Brazilian and European Portuguese, after and before of the "Acordo Ortográfico" - Spelling Agreement). The rest of conjugators just offer either Brazilian or Portuguese verb forms. In some cases, there are important errors in verb inflection, or

a limited list of verbs in the database, even common verbs are out of some of these conjugators.

All Portuguese conjugators, except Cilenis, don't allow us to conjugate verbs that are not in their lists of verbs. The most similar conjugator to Cilenis Conjugador is Flip, but the interface is slow and the user needs too much clicks to see the verb in the desired inflection.

For Spanish, we found many on-line conjugators, in some cases integrated into more general systems containing other languages. Some examples of Spanish conjugators are the following:

- Reverso
- Wordreference
- Verbix for Spanish
- Onoma
- Conjuga

The most complete conjugators are both *Onoma* and *Conjuga* (open-source tool from the University of Santiago de Compostela). *Onoma* is oriented toward philology and quite complex for ordinary users. On the other hand, *Conjuga* is the source core of our Spanish Cilenis Conjugator. We have made some corrections on it and enlarged the number of verb inflections.

For Galician, there are only two options:

- Verbix for Galician
- Digalego

Both of them do not provide information for all Galician verbs. Besides, the interface of *Digalego* is a large list of verbs and does not contain a search engine. This makes uncomfortable any searching procedure. By contrast, the main aim of our interface is to be easy to use by providing a minimalist search form.

As far as the Android market is concerned, we found a wide range of apps to conjugate, especially for Spanish. Among these apps, "El Conjugador" has an interface in French which is quite slow. On the other hand, "Spanish Verbs", "4001 Spanish Verbs" and "Spanish Verbs Conjugator" are other options based on lists, sometimes even without providing all the verbal tenses. For Portuguese, we just found "Portuguese Verbs", but as in the case of many other apps, it only offers a small list of verbs to conjugate. Finally, for Galician, the only option is *Conxugalego*, based on the core of Cilenis Conjugator, which was developed by the members of our research team ProINat@GE, at the University of Santiago de Compostela.

6. Further Applications

Besides the use of verb conjugators in L2 learning, in current work, we have integrated our conjugators into other Natural Language Processing tools. In particular, it has been inserted into "*Avalingua*", software aimed at automatically identifying and evaluating spelling, lexical, and grammatical errors in written language. The role of the verb conjugators within the *Avalingua* architecture is to generate a complete lexicon with all possible verb forms.

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Article:

Using Blogs: authentic material and ranking quality for SLA

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Abstract

Exposure real life language experiences forms an integral part of the acquisition process. Authentic materials – those derived from the culture of the target language rather than specially produced for language learners – increase the relevance of the learning experience by reusing texts taken directly from the target culture. Web 2.0 technologies increase opportunities for bringing authentic materials into formal language learning environments by allowing material to be collected, reused and shared amongst language teachers and learners. This paper aims to look at the role of blogs in facilitating the use of authentic material by English language teachers and learners and the impact of the most authoritative blogs in the wider Web and in Social Media.

To reach this objective, the blog ranking site Technorati was used to select the most popular blogs for English language learners and teachers and each blog was analysed according to the authenticity of the cultural material used for language learning. The analysis reveals that 100% of the material on 56.25% of the blogs selected was authentic material and over 70% of the material on a further 35.3% of blogs was authentic.

Secondly, the impact of these blogs in the wider Web and Social Media was measured in order to draw some conclusions regarding the role of language learning blogs outside the world of blogging and the communities they serve and provide an image of the relationship between blogs and bloggers, the Web and Social Media.

The results show an inherent bias within Web 2.0 technologies towards providing contemporary authentic material for language learning – the technology itself encourages its use – and that sometimes blogs can have an impact beyond their communities through the Web and Social Media.

Keywords: blogs, authentic materials, Web 2.0, social media, SLA.

1. Introduction and objectives

Learning a language requires meaningful learning experiences facilitated by opportunities to interact with and produce language material that involve communication, whether these opportunities occur in a formal learning environment or not, exposure to a language forms an integral part of the acquisition process.

Therefore the development of tools and web based applications that enable written, audio, visual, and audio-visual material to be produced and shared has been embraced by language teachers and learners. Whilst these developments have increased the variety and quantity of material available for language learning, quality is also an aspect that needs to be considered. Authentic materials increase the relevance of language

learning by introducing meaningful material from real life situations. Web 2.0 technologies increase opportunities for bringing authentic materials into formal language learning environments by allowing material to be collected, reused and shared amongst language teachers and learners.

In this sense, blogs are one of the earliest forms of Web 2.0 technology easily available and widely used and provide an avenue for sharing, using, reusing and adapting authentic material for English language learning. By looking at the way in which authentic material is used on blogs an indication can be gained of the potential of Web 2.0 tools for increasing the quality of learning materials readily available to teachers and learners.

Therefore this paper has two objectives. Firstly to demonstrate that blogs allow teachers and learners to share, use and reuse to authentic material for language learning in order to draw some conclusions concerning the extent to which their potential to increase the use of more authentic learning materials has been developed and secondly that a blogs authority within the English language learning blogging community is also reflected in its wider influence in the Web or via Social Media. If blogs allow teachers and learners to share use and reuse authentic material, and given that this is considered desirable, then these blogs should be of interest outside the blogging community. By measuring their impact on the Web and Social Media it can be seen if this is the case.

2. Theory

2.1. Second Language acquisition theory and web 2.0

With the rise of the Communicative Approach, especially since Krashen (1985) developed the Input hypothesis and Swain countered with the Output hypothesis (Swain, 1995) the idea that exposure to the target language as a fundamental aspect of language learning has been related to the concept of authentic material. Authentic material is material produced for consumption by native speakers. The use of authentic material for language learning in the classroom helps learning activities approximate real life situations, as advocated by the Communicative Approach (Harmer, 1991). As Gilmour notes (Gilmour 2007) current language textbooks have inadequately addressed the need for the incorporation of authentic materials in course syllabi, therefore Blogs and Web 2.0 offer an avenue for access to these materials readily adapted or prepared for the classroom and can fulfil a need not currently met by global publishing houses.

ICTs and Web 2.0 provide the possibility of unmediated access to L2 culture not only to consume but also to participate through cultural production in the second language (Rico et al, 2009). In addition, given Nation's strands of language learning, ICTs and Web 2.0 are ideal tools for developing courses and materials that reflect current thinking on modern language acquisition that is incorporates aspects of the input/output hypothesis.

Web 2.0 is defined as a platform for content creation, dissemination, remix and reuse, establishing a highly participatory and collaborative relationship with users. The essential factor in these Web 2.0 environments is communication (Reig, 2008), including tools such as adapted social networks (Elgg, Eduspace, Learnhub), communities of practice (Ning), collaborative environments (GoogleDocs, wikis, GoogleWave) and other tools such as blogs, wikis, etc. These services allow communication to flow through a network of learning. This Web 2.0 transcends the simple transmission and consumption of information to become a network of that offers options to create, share, remix, integrate and extend knowledge. The advantages in education have recently begun to be explored, with undeniable opportunities offered by

educational networks to foster collaborative work and provide all the following benefits (Haro, 2008):

- Centralization of educational activities in a single space.
- Fluency in communication between teachers and students.
- The promotion of the sense of educational community.
- A simple and efficient coordination of learning groups.
- An improvement in basic social behaviour of students (learning what to say / do, how and when)

In this sense, the inclusion of Web 2.0 technology in language teaching provides various benefits related to current thinking on modern language acquisition. They are:

- It encourages the creation of authentic contexts in which students can interact in learning, in our case, language and culture being studied.
- It offers the opportunity for active learning through cooperation and collaboration among students.
- The personalization of the learning process in virtual environments (orientation and individual tutoring tailored to student needs).
- Easy access to almost unlimited meaning-focused input.
- Require learner participation for meaning-focused output.
- Allow fluency development through online virtual communities such as Second Life.
- The possibility of unmediated access to L2 culture not only to consume but also to participate through cultural production in the second language.

2.2. Blogs and authentic materials

Stephen Downs (2005) provides an excellent introduction to blogs and their use in education. According to Downs blogs first appeared in 1999 and have become an important aspect of Web 2.0 technology.

A blog is a personal website that contains content organized like a journal or a diary. Each entry is dated, and the entries are displayed on the web page in reverse chronological order, so that the most recent entry is posted at the top. Readers catch up with blogs by starting at the top and reading down until they encounter material they're already read.

Though blogs are typically thought of as personal journals, there is no limit to what may be covered in a blog. It is common for people to write blogs to describe their work, their hobbies, their pets, social and political issues, or news and current events. And while blogs are typically the work of one individual, blogs combining contributions of several people, 'group blogs', are also popular.

Blogs are connected to each other to form what is commonly known as the 'blogosphere'. The most common form of connection is to link to each to each other. Blog authors may also post a list of blogs they frequently read; this list is known as a 'blogroll'. Blogs may also be read through special readers, known as 'RSS readers', which aggregate blog summaries produced by blog software. Readers use RSS readers to 'subscribe' to a blog..

While blogs once dominated the personal publishing landscape, they now form one part in a much more diverse landscape. Many people who formerly wrote blogs now use social networking sites such as MySpace or Facebook. Others use 'microblogging' services such as Twitter. And blogs, which began as text-based services, have branched into audio blogs (also known as 'podcasts') and video blogs ('vlogs').

Blogs are widely popular in education, as evidenced by the 400,000 educational blogs hosted by edublogs. Teachers have been using them to support teaching and learning since at least 2005. Because blogs are connected, they can foster the development of a

learning community. Authors can share opinions with each other and support each other with commentary and answers to questions.

Blogs are an early example of Web 2.0 technology as they are easily produced by users and participatory. They provide an avenue for sharing, using, reusing and adapting material for English language learning produced for and by English language teachers and learners. Given this it is reasonable to expect that blogs dedicated to English language teaching and learning represent current thinking within the profession on Second Language Acquisition. One of the dominant approaches to SLA is the Communicative Approach, a central tenet of which is the use of authentic material. Therefore a communicative medium produced for and by English language teachers and learners should use and reuse a high quantity of authentic material. By testing whether this is the case it can be shown not only that Blogs enable the diffusion of authentic material for SLA but that authentic material is in fact considered to be a vital requisite for successful language learning by both the producers of blogs and their participants/public.

2.3. Influence of English language learning blogs on the Web and Social Media

The authority of English language teaching and learning blogs within the blogging community is also reflected in their impact and influence within the Web as a whole as well as in Social Media. This connection is not a direct connection. Blogs are ranked in a way that reflects the medium, the more posts a blog contains and the more other bloggers link to an individual blog, the higher its ranking. This means influence is only measured within the community of bloggers and only at the level of the blog as a whole, not at the level of an individual post. Influence on the Web and within Social Media functions at the level of individual page links and therefore can reflect the influence of individual posts and their content. Blog rankings are concerned primarily with the opinions of other bloggers of blogs as a whole and the number and frequency of posts. Measures of influence or impact on the Web and in Social Media are concerned primarily with quality and interest of the content of individual posts. However, whilst the connection may not be completely direct a relationship exists between a blogs ranking within the Blogosphere and its impact on the Web and Social Media because of the way all of these mediums interact and interlink. This paper demonstrates how these three areas are interconnected in the case of blogs concerning English language teaching and learning.

In the first section of the paper the selection of the blogs was based on their ranking within the Blogosphere - a ranking that is in many ways quantitative in that it considers the quantity of posts and the influence of the blog as a whole - and a qualitative analysis of the content of each blog was undertaken based on the use of authentic material; whereas the second objective is related to the quality of individual posts or pages as measured by incoming links on the Web and in Social Media.

3. Method

3.1. Selecting the blogs and evaluating the learning material

In order to evaluate the authenticity of materials used on language learning blogs the criteria for choosing to include a particular blog needs to be established. The popularity of a blog measures the influence its contents have over a particular audience. There are essentially two measures of this: popularity through citations, as well as popularity through affiliation (i.e. blogroll).

While it takes time for a blog to become popular through blogrolls, permalinks can boost popularity more quickly, and are perhaps more indicative of popularity and authority than blogrolls, since they denote that people are actually reading the blog's content and

deem it valuable or noteworthy. Technorati (technology + literati) is a blog search engine (Technorati, 2010) that ranks blogs based on the number of incoming links and uses this to measure a site's standing and influence in the blogosphere, a rating known as Technorati Authority. This is calculated based on a site's linking behaviour, categorization and other associated data over a short, finite period of time. A site's authority may rapidly rise and fall depending on what the blogosphere is discussing at the moment, and how often a site produces content being referenced by other sites. The sites were selected by cross-referencing the top sites based on Technorati authority returned by tag searches for English language teaching. All sites rated with a Technorati Authority greater than 1 were evaluated. All blogs listed by Technorati rated at least 1 in terms of authority, thus simply by creating a blog a ranking of 1 can be achieved, therefore only blogs with an authority higher than 1 were included as this demonstrates that a particular blog had an authority greater than that that could be achieved by simply existing. Of the more than 200 blogs with posts tagged as EFL/ESL only 17 had a Technorati authority rating greater than 1.

The blogs were evaluated according to the proportion of authentic materials used in order to measure the extent to which blogs reflected a preference for authentic material. First the type of content used, that is the genres represented – for example news, fiction, or biography, then an assessment was made as to whether the material was authentic material originally intended for a native speaking audience or not.

The last 50 posts were analysed and the proportion of authentic material measured. The number of posts that used authentic material was divided by the total of 50 posts and expressed as a percentage. Only the last 50 posts were analysed in order to provide a manageable amount of material and create a sample that reflects the medium – a blogs' relevance is measured and ranked according to its most recent posts.

The selection and analysis of the blogs was undertaken in June 2010. Due to the nature of the medium, rankings and Technorati authority measures change constantly. Therefore the same analysis was conducted again in 2012 and the results displayed in Figure 1 were obtained.

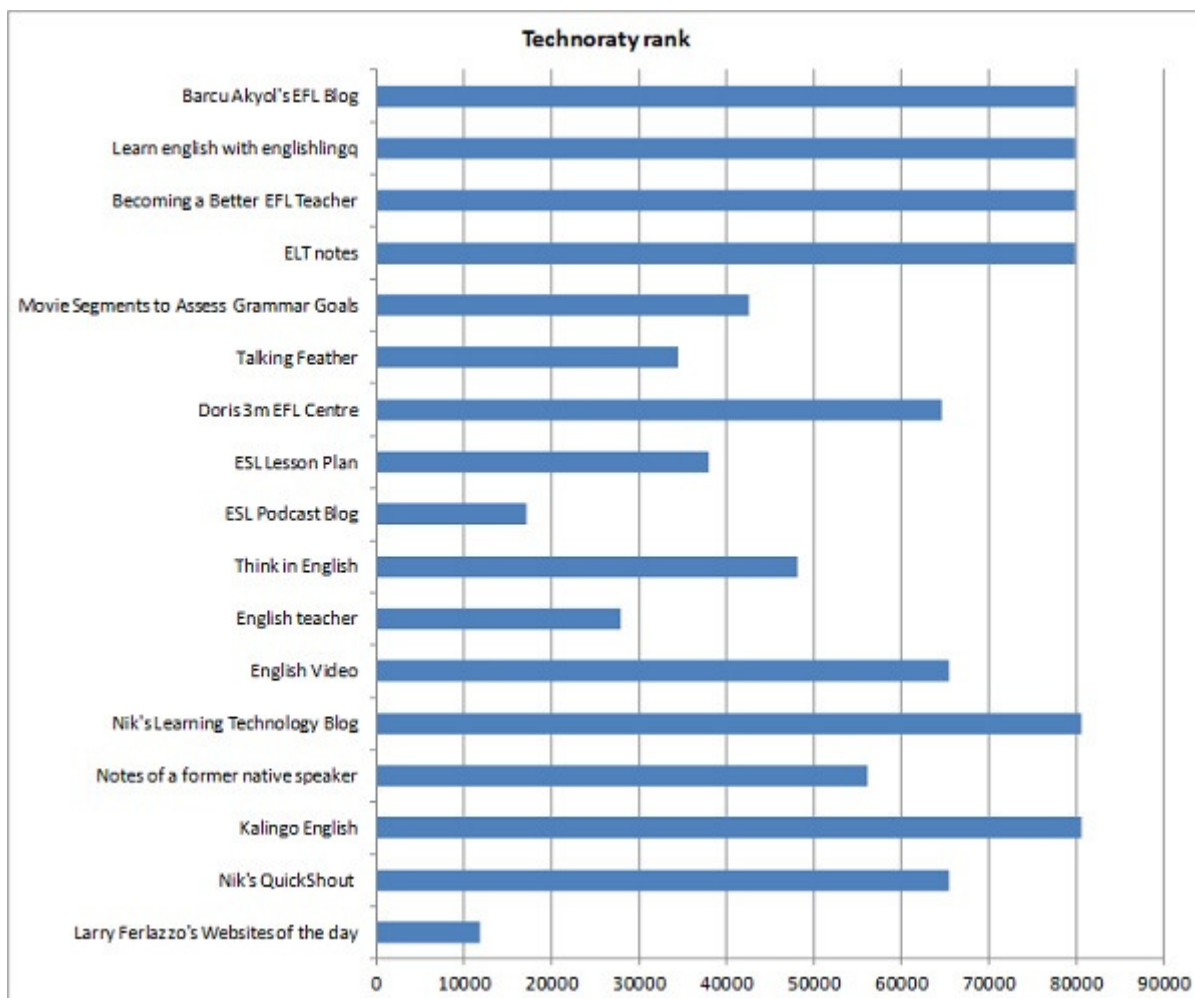


Figure 1. Technorati rank.

In this graph the lower the result the higher the Technorati ranking, the highest possible ranking is 1 meaning the highest ranked blog

3.2. Measuring the impact of the blogs in the Web and Social Media

The ranking of the blogs within the Blogosphere assigned by Technorati was compared with ranking measure for the Web and Social Media. In order to do this Webrank Stats was used as this takes a variety of measures, including Google Pagerank, Alexa, Compete and Quantcast Rank, Pages Indexed and Backlinks in Google, Bing & Alexa, as well as a tool called Sociometer which measures social reach in terms of tweets, likes and other parameters.

4. Results

Firstly a brief description of the learning material and the proportion of authentic material used are given for each of the 17 blogs followed by some concluding analysis regarding authentic material on blogs. Secondly the results concerning the impact of the blogs in the Web and Social Media are presented, interpreted and analysed.

4.1. Analysis of the blogs

The following is a brief description of each blog.

4.1.1. Larry Ferlazzo's Websites of the Day

- <http://larryferlazzo.edublogs.org>

- Content: As this is a collation of resources available on the internet the author links to every genre available, although some are more dominant than others. News web sites for text articles and photos are particularly dominant as are sites dedicated to education. However, given the enormous quantity of links and topics covered no one genre dominates to the exclusion of all others.
- Authenticity: Apart from the specific EFL teaching resources topics, all of the other lists refer to authentic materials.
- Proportion of authentic material: 92%

4.1.2. *Nik's Quick Shout: Links and Opinion on Learning, Technology, Web 2.0 and EFL*

- <http://quickshout.blogspot.com>
- Content: The site uses the tools described above to teach all aspects of the English language using a variety of cultural genres including poetry, animation, literature such as Shakespeare, history, drama, eBooks, karaoke, lyrics and music, films, TV and travel writing. The web sites and online resources the author uses cover all media available through Web 2.0.
- Authenticity: Whilst as stated above this blog doesn't deal directly with content the tools it reviews allow direct access to authentic materials as well as the creation of materials by students in the target language. These can be used as a form of evaluation, review and recycled as teaching material for other classes.
- Proportion of authentic material: 100%

4.1.3. *Kalinago English*

- <http://kalinago.blogspot.com>
- Content: The blog uses a wide variety of topics to teach English, all based on the interests of the author's students. Her teaching method is to only use topics and content that comes from the students, their interests and needs. Therefore the topics are very contemporary and can also be very specific. For example one post is dedicated to using the success of the singer Susan Boyle. Each topic includes a detailed lesson plan, materials and teacher's guide.
- Authenticity: A great deal of the blog is dedicated to providing lessons and materials for English teachers; therefore whilst many of the materials are authentic they are adapted for the classroom.
- Proportion of authentic material: 84%

4.1.4. *Notes of a former native speaker*

- <http://jonintaiwan.blogspot.com>
- Content: Mostly announcements of conferences and calls for papers as well as reviews of academic articles and books.
- Authenticity: This blog is useful as an announcement service for academics. 7 of the previous 10 posts were conference announcements and calls for papers.
- Proportion of authentic material: 0%

4.1.5. *Nik's Learning Technology Blog*

- <http://nikpeachey.blogspot.com>
- Content: This blog is about using tools rather than the content teachers choose to use them with. The topics with the high numbers of posts are images, speaking skills, listening skills, reading skills, writing skills but the topic video has the most posts.
- Authenticity: Whilst the blog focuses on tools rather than materials, the Web 2.0 tools the author discusses allow the integration of authentic and student generated materials into many aspects of language learning.
- Proportion of authentic material: 100%

4.1.6. *English Video*

- <http://engleo.com>
- Content: The videos vary in content. Some are traditional English lessons on video. Some are like audio listening exercises with pre-watching and post-watching exercises and others simply explain a particularly language point.

- Authenticity: The videos are developed especially to teach English and most integrate authentic materials as a teacher explaining a particular language point. There is also a drama series but it was produced to teach English.
- Proportion of authentic material: 78%

4.1.7. English teacher

- <http://englishteachermargarita.blogspot.com>
- Content: Comic, cartoons and video based dialogues.
- Authenticity: The author uses a large quantity of authentic material, every lesson centres around at least one authentic video as well as a comic or cartoon and a student produced video.
- Proportion of authentic material: 100%

4.1.8. Think in English

- <http://auroenglish.blogspot.com>
- Content: Movies and music feature heavily followed by writing genres such as comics, fiction, poetry and pupil's blogs. However, avatars and virtual life are also used extensively in many activities. The emphasis is on interactive activities that allow the students to use the language they have acquired to produce something online whether it be a birthday card, an avatar or a comic.
- Authenticity: All of the activities posted use authentic materials gathered from the web.
- Proportion of authentic material: 100%

4.1.9. ESL Podcast Blog

- http://www.eslpod.com/eslpod_blog
- Content: Text discussing podcasts you then have to pay to use. There is some discussion of general EFL issues but this mostly a marketing tool for a user pays service.
- Authenticity: Whilst without a paid subscription you can't hear all of the podcasts there are a couple of samples available that give a taste of the format of each podcast. The podcasts typically include two, sometimes three, hosts presenting authentic audio material the producers have gathered from the internet, radio, TV or film. This material is then discussed by the hosts and activities are presented that draw on the material to focus on a particular language point or skill. This format exposes students directly to US culture as they are learning an aspect of English for the first time.
- Proportion of authentic material: 100%

4.1.10: ESL Lesson Plan

- <http://www.esl-lesson-plan.com>
- Content: The lesson topics are based on current events, websites the author has found, songs etc. Whatever the author has found, used or been told about that week. Many use web sites or various ICT applications. He also includes quite a bit of information about academic events such as conferences and publications.
- Authenticity: The author integrates authentic material into nearly every lesson, however the blog does not focus on material rather his experiences as a teacher and the ideas he has for lessons.
- Proportion of authentic material: 90%

4.1.11. Doris 3m EFL Centre

- <http://doris3meflcenter.blogspot.com>
- Content: The author is most interested in using virtual worlds to teach languages so the cultures represented are those of her students and follow collaborators.
- Authenticity: The content of the blog is mostly English lessons delivered through PowerPoint presentations but also some lessons based on videos and texts that are authentic examples English speaking culture, for example, YouTube videos in which the target language is used.

- Proportion of authentic material: 72%

4.1.12. *Talking Feather*

- <http://Talking-Feather.com>
- Content: The blog is entirely devoted to information given in text form about the history and culture of Native American Indians. Whilst the form of the lessons is traditional, the content allows access to a culture most L2 learners no little or nothing about apart from a few stereotypes from Hollywood movies. Most of the writing and all of the myths used are written Native Americans. This blog is probably the only place in which Native American culture is used to teach English.
- Authenticity: Another reason for the popularity of the site is that it provides direct contact with American Indians who relate their culture and experiences for EFL learners. Whilst the lessons use material especially developed for EFL students the posts and comments by American Indians are authentic and provide a rare opportunity for EFL learners to have direct contact with a minority culture in the United States and Canada.
- Proportion of authentic material: 100%

4.1.13. *Movie Segments to Assess Grammar*

- <http://moviesegmentstoassessgrammargoes.blogspot.com>
- Content: The author uses all genres of movies. His only criteria are that the movie is relatively well known and ideally familiar to as many of his students as possible. They are nearly all big budget Hollywood films. This is an example of very traditional EFL activities wedded to a great use of video to motivate the students. All of the activities the author has developed for the movie clips are typical textbook activities, matching vocabulary to pictures etc. So this is an example of a blog that uses the format of a textbook adapted to the multimedia possibilities of the web.
- Authenticity: The blog uses all authentic material; the movies are not adapted for EFL learners.
- Proportion of authentic material: 100%

4.1.14: *ELT notes*

- <http://eltnotes.blogspot.com>
- Content: Online journal in which the author posts her thoughts and those of others on educational theories and approaches for teaching English as a second language.
- Authenticity: The videos she posts of talks by various educational theorists are authentic, and may be of use in very high level classes in which learners are able to consciously reflect on their own learning and discuss it in a second language.
- Proportion of authentic material: 0%

4.1.15. *Becoming a Better EFL Teacher*

- <http://betterefllteacher.blogspot.com>
- Content: The author mainly uses news articles and some animated videos when related to an article.
- Authenticity: All of the news items are authentic materials from news web sites and the author provides a link to the original source. However, of the videos posted, they are all especially developed for English learners and use scripted dialogue rather than real conversation recorded.
- Proportion of authentic material: 76%

4.1.16: *Learn English with EnglishLingQ*

- <http://www.englishlingq.com>
- Content: The authors discuss almost exclusively current affairs and contemporary issues. For example the topics covered by various podcasts include Canadian life, current affairs, entertainment, the environment and everyday life. This is an excellent resource for listening activities and provides

a great insight into Canadian culture and Canadian perspectives on current affairs. The podcasts provide a dynamic and up-to-date image of Canadian culture through structured EFL activities.

- Authenticity: The audio podcasts are authentic radio style broadcasts; they are not adapted for EFL learners. The podcasters talk freely on their topic, in the same manner as any radio based talk show. They do not follow a script or adapt their language. They are authentic listening materials that provide a not-so-often found Canadian viewpoint.
- Proportion of authentic material: 100%

4.1.17. Burcu Akyol's EFL Blog: Impressions, reflections, reviews, tips and resources from an English teacher

- <http://burcuakyol.edublogs.org>
- Content: The author mainly uses news articles and some animated videos when related to an article. The posts related directly to teaching include a mixture of text, links and videos related to the topic of the post. For example, in a post entitled 10 classroom management ideas that worked in my class, each tip is accompanied by a photo and some of a video to illustrate the particular tip.
- Authenticity: In all of the posts on teaching tips and lessons the videos used are authentic, are not adapted for English learners and the photos reflect aspects of the culture relevant to the lesson.
- Proportion of authentic material: 100%.

4.2. Analysis of the blogs: authentic materials

Many genres are represented on the blogs, movies, television and music, current affairs and news, as well as traditional English lessons broadcast by video or podcast. One blog is dedicated to the teaching of grammar through movie clips; several others adapt current news and activities for teaching English. Many use songs for teaching activities. One covers ICT, both hardware and software, for the teaching of second languages including news and advice for using ICTs and Web 2.0 for teaching English. Dialogues are also used in a wide range of contexts, especially in the podcasts and videos. Some are dialogues adapted to the class, but most are authentic dialogues recorded in real life situations.

Of the 17 blogs selected 9 (Figure 2) used authentic materials for every post that is their common practice for producing their blog is take authentic material and present it for language learning. The majority of posts on a further 6 blogs used authentic materials, 3 over 80% of the time and the other 3 over 70% of the time. There were 2 blogs that didn't use authentic material at all because whilst directed towards the English learning community they had a different function; one informed readers of upcoming academic events and the other reflected the thoughts of the author on current thinking regarding language teaching. Therefore of the 17 blogs deemed authoritative for English language learning by Technorati, 15 employed authentic materials for teaching and learning – 9 for all of their postings and a further 6 interspersed authentic material with a much smaller selection of material produced specifically for language learning. The average proportion of authentic material on each blog was 81.88%.

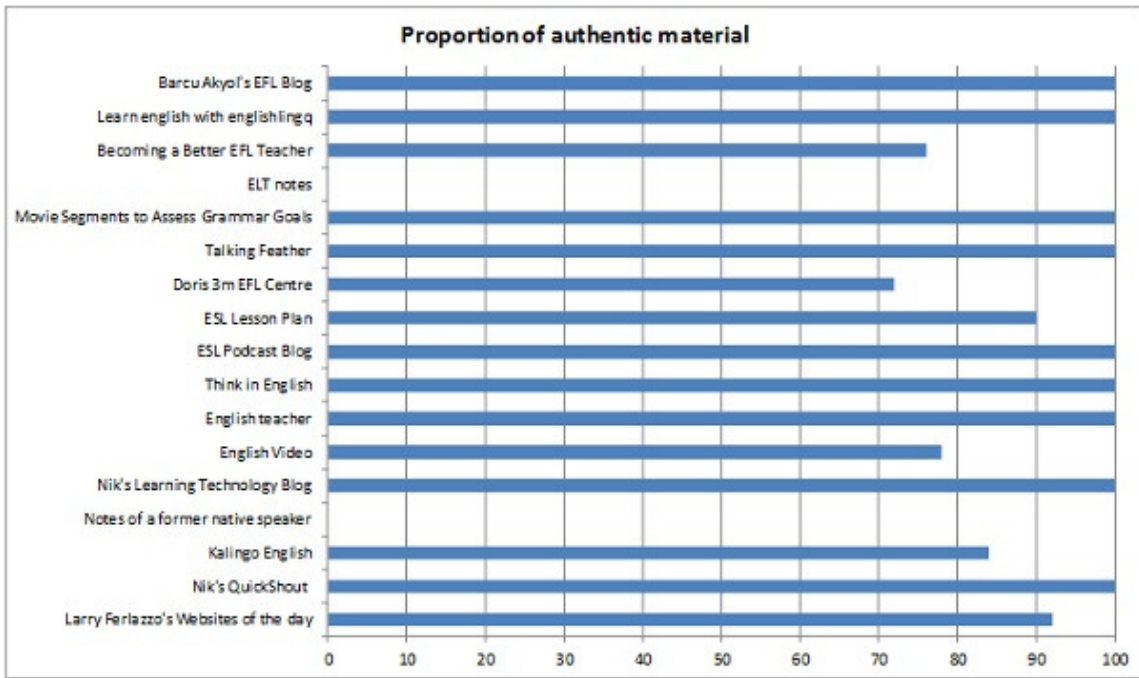


Figure 2. Proportion of authentic material.

This is not surprising. The nature of the environment and how Technorati measures blog popularity means that the blogs that have more frequent entries and more inbound links are rated more highly. This means that blogs that use relevant, contemporary materials are rated more highly by blog search engines and therefore receive more traffic which in turn further increases their rating. Authenticity is structurally encouraged in the medium and the search engines that serve it. This is good news for language teachers and learners. Blogs provide direct access to authentic contemporary cultural artefacts taken from the language being learnt. This is theoretically predictable given the nature of the medium and this brief investigation shows it to be reflected in reality.

4.3. Impact of the Selected Blogs in the web and Social Media

The graph below (Figure 3) lists each blog according to its ranking with the Webrank Score. The highest possible ranking is 10. This is a global measure that includes both Web rankings and Social Media rankings.

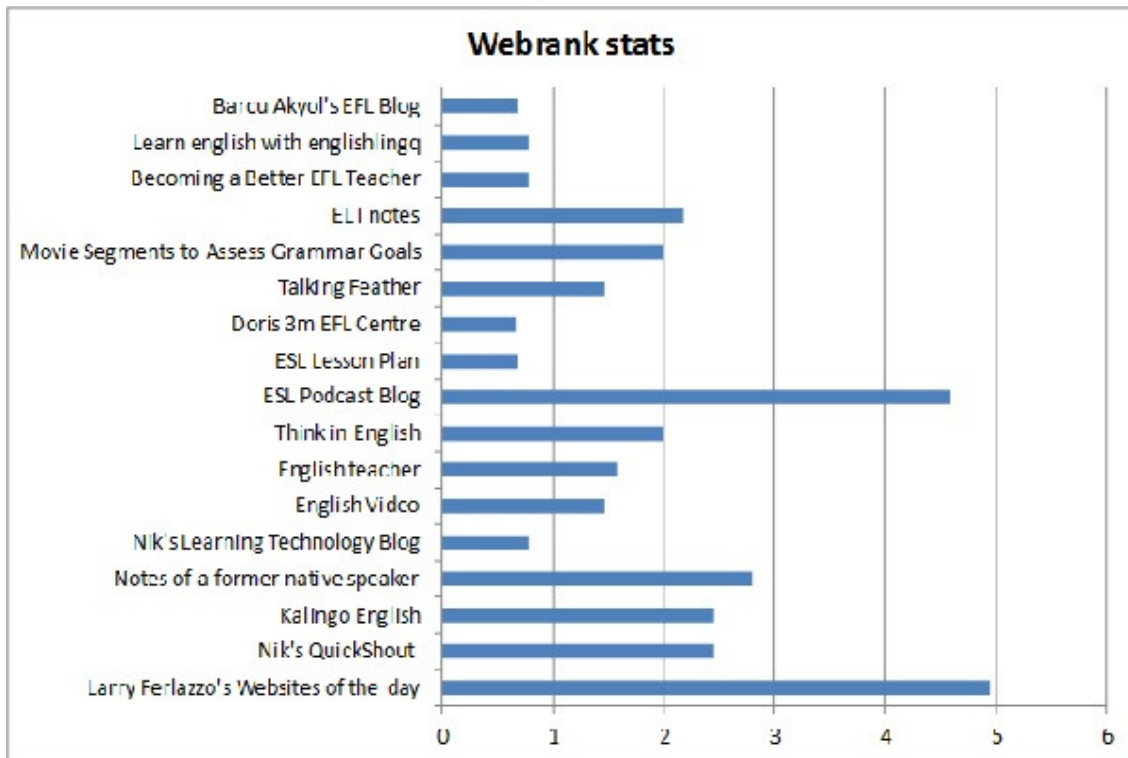


Figure 3. Webrank stats.

As will be discussed below, the relationship between Technorati ranking, ranking in the Blogosphere, and Web ranking is not completely direct. Whilst for most blogs their ordinal ranking in by Technorati corresponds with the Webrank stats ranking, four blogs –23.5% of the blogs selected– do not follow this trend and Rank higher on either Web rankings, Social Media rankings or both, than they do in Technorati rankings.

The following graph (Figure 4) shows each blog according to pages indexed and backlinks as measured by Google. Whilst the relationship between Technorati ranking and Google's pages in indexed ranking is quite direct, the lower the higher the Technorati ranking the better the Page Indexed ranking by Google, the relationship between backlinks and Technorati ranking is not quite so straightforward. Kalingo English, Nik's Learning Technology Blog and Barcu Akyol's EFL Blog all scored better backlinks ratings than Technorati Ranking in the Blogosphere or Google Pages Indexed ranking.

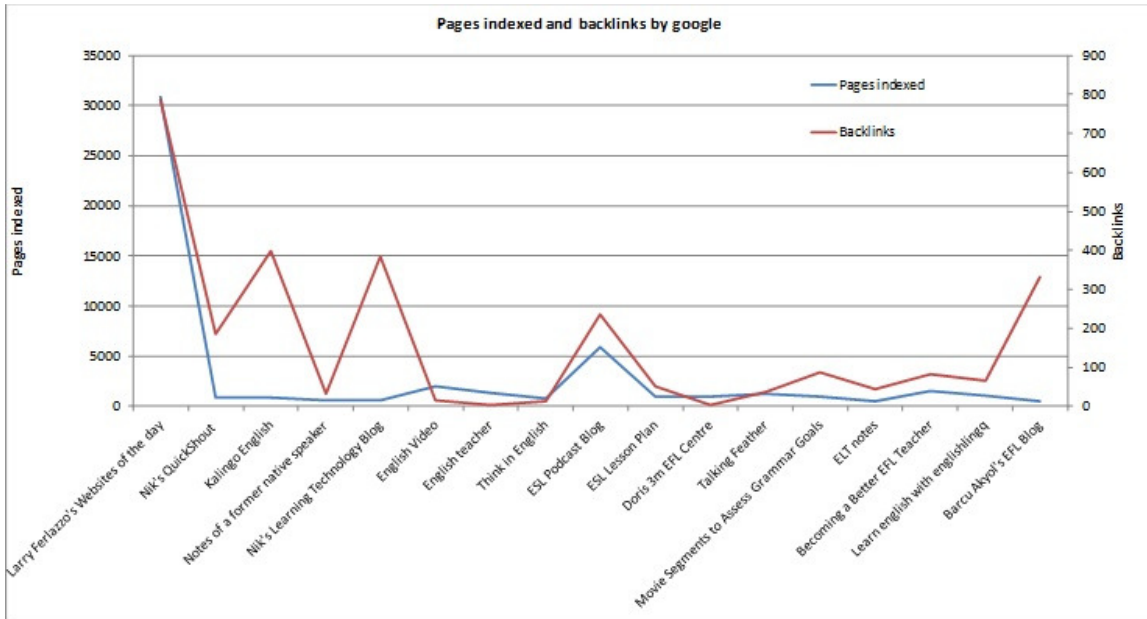


Figure 4. Pages indexed and backlinks by Google.

If we add Sociometer's measure (Figure 5) of ranking influence in Social Networks this picture is repeated with the exception of Kalingo English, which ranks well in backlinks but not so well in Technorati Ranking, Google Pages Indexed or Sociometer. In addition Movie Segments to Assess Grammar Goals ranks well in Sociometer but in all the measures ranks consistently with its Technorati ranking. Nik's Learning Technology Blog and Barcu Akyol's EFL Blog also ranked more than could be expected given their Technorati ranking according to Sociometer.

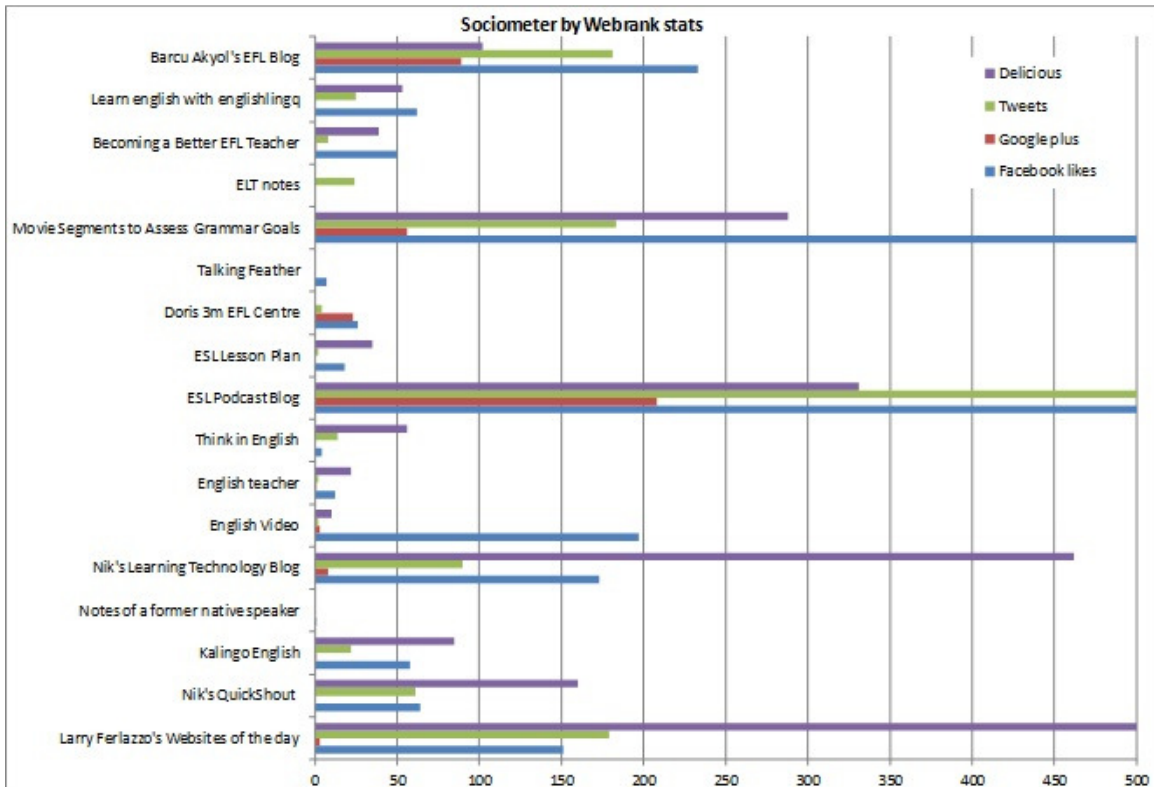


Figure 5. Sociometer by Webrank stats.

Therefore all of the blogs rank across all three measures in the same way apart from the backlinks ranking by Google, in which Kalingo English, Nik's Learning Technology Blog and Barcu Akyol's EFL Blog all scored better, and Sociometer's ranking in which Nik's Learning Technology Blog, Barcu Akyol's EFL Blog and Movie Segments to Assess Grammar Goals ranked better than their Technorati ranking would indicate.

So whilst for the majority of the 17 blogs selected there was a direct relationship between Technorati ranking and the backlinks and Page Indexed Web rankings as well as Sociometer's Social Media impact ranking there were several exceptions.

Nik's Learning Technology Blog, Barcu Akyol's EFL Blog ranked better than expected for backlink rankings and Social Media rankings, Kalingo English ranked better than expected for backlink rankings and Movie Segments to Assess Grammar Goals ranked better than expected in Social Media.

These differences reflect the quality of individual posts on the blogs that ranked better than expected on the backlinks and Sociometer rankings than their Technorati ranking. Backlinks shows the interest on the web by linking to a particular page within a blog, as does Sociometer in that it measures interest within Social Media for a particularly post through measures such as *likes* or *tweets*.

5. Conclusions

A blog has the structure of an online journal or diary so it is an effective way for English teachers to share ideas, materials and experiences between themselves and their students which are current and relevant. It allows the use of various types of media such as images, video, audio, text, as well as user interactivity in all of these different media. This means a blog can provide material, discussion and advice concerning all four skills necessary for second language acquisition: speaking; listening; reading; and writing. This, together with the absence intermediaries such as editors and publishers means that English learners can experience direct contact with contemporary English-speaking cultures in a way appropriate to their language ability yet still enjoying access to authentic materials. This increases the opportunities for English teachers to enhance learning and motivate students.

The blogs analysed are also all excellent examples of a crucial aspect of teaching, sharing good practice. This is an essential aspect of continuing professional development. Previously the ideas and experiences of teachers could be shared only amongst colleagues; blogs enable ideas and experience to be shared with any teacher or student with access to the internet anywhere in the world. The blogs analysed here harness the immense creativity of ordinary EFL teachers and make it available cheaply and easily to the entire profession.

Several of the blogs analysed rank better on the Web and in Social Media than in the Blogosphere. This demonstrates interest for some of the content of these blogs greater than the influence of the blog itself within the blogging community and is further evidence of the potential of blogs as one of Web 2.0 tool that can be employed for English language teaching and learning.

Although blog ranking engines such as Technorati provide a good measure of authority within the community of bloggers, other metrics need to be considered in order to build a more complete image of the impact and influence of English language teaching and learning blogs in the Web and Social Media.

The richness and variety of the authentic material used on the blogs and the degree of innovation applied to adapting ICTs and Web 2.0 tools to teaching EFL shown by EFL bloggers demonstrates the potential that has been unleashed with the democratization of information production.

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Article:

Training language teachers to sustain self-directed language learning: an exploration of advisers' experiences on a web-based open virtual learning environment

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Abstract

This article describes the rationale for pedagogical, technological and organizational choices in the design of a web-based and open virtual learning environment (VLE) promoting and sustaining self-directed language learning. Based on the last forty years of research on learner autonomy at the CRAPEL according to Holec's definition (1988), we designed a global VLE for researchers working on language learning autonomy, teachers with various degrees of practice and experience in self-directed learning, and language learners. The VLE is thus divided into three spaces for the different types of participant, each offering dedicated social networking possibilities and resources to enrich the others.

Our study focuses on the space dedicated to teacher training, the main objective being to help them build knowledge and skills for a new educational role in the paradigm of language learning autonomy (LLA). This space contains specially created Web-TV resources and audio podcasts of self-directed learning advising sessions, is based on reflective analysis and relies on a professional social network, following the principles of the "community of practice" (Wenger, 1998). In line with the principles of self-directed learning, teachers acting as trainers in the VLE mainly enact supportive and facilitative functions as advisers do in face-to-face interactions. We explore how training for advisers is organized in this online environment characterized by a high degree of openness (Jézégou, 2010). We report on findings from the way teachers within their dedicated space, using quantitative and qualitative data collected from interviews, questionnaires and analysis of logs. We look at the tensions that emerge as teachers conceive their new role and engage in new training practices given the opportunities afforded by the environment. The data provide insights to how the VLE can support training practices based on reflection, participation and collaboration.

Keywords: Virtual learning environment, computer-mediated communication, online collaboration, self-directed learning and training, advising practices, community of practice.

1. Introduction

Learner autonomy has been a cornerstone of language learning policy in Europe for the last forty years. Although little is said about computer assisted language learning (CALL) in the main publications which contributed to building the paradigm in Europe, there are close relationships between learner autonomy and technology, as highlighted by Blin (2005) – in part due to the still “growing role of technology in education” (Benson & Voller, 1997: 6) in general, but also because technology provides a favourable context within which autonomy (mainly understood as independent learning) can be promoted and supported (Warschauer, 1996; Benson, 1998). The development can be characterized in two stages. Firstly, the 1990s were characterized by the development of resource centres promoting learner autonomy through the use of a variety of technologies embedded into the physical learning space where resources and contents were previously chosen by the educational institution (technologies were seen as learning resources). The 2000s offered new learning possibilities, via the Internet with its abundant supply of resources, and by implementing Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) (e.g. ELE for Reinders, 2006; VELA for Toogood, 2006). Internet and VLE multiplied the possibilities of self-access to resources but also added new complications as they require specific e-literacy abilities (technologies as a framework for learning). Nevertheless, the context these technologies afforded to learner autonomy has also helped to hide the challenges and issues by overestimating the capacity of technologies (e.g. free navigation, flexible use, etc.) to develop learner autonomy as pointed by several researchers (e.g. Demaizière & Foucher, 1998; Boulton, 2006). Some of these challenges from the last twenty years are still relevant today: access or excess of online resources (Barbot, 1998), autonomy as the *possibility* to learn vs autonomy as the *capacity* to learn via detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action (Little, 1991), the curation of online resources as a key element to develop learner autonomy through the competence of selecting (Cembalo, 1995), isolation vs collaboration to enhance autonomy (Eneau & Develotte, 2012), to cite but a few.

From this general context, the article describes the rationale for pedagogical, technological and organizational choices in the design of a web-based and open virtual learning environment (VLE) promoting and sustaining self-directed language learning. Based on the CRAPEL's research on learner autonomy and according to Holec's definitions (1979, 1988), we designed a global VLE whose purpose is to bring together researchers on language learning autonomy (LLA), experienced or less-experienced teachers in self-directed learning and advising, and experienced or less-experienced learners in self-directed learning. We argue that in order to promote effective interaction through VLE for enhancing the comprehension of self-directed learning, the VLE design should privilege new hierarchies and relationships based on the Web2.0 learning philosophy (social networking, knowledge and exchange of resources, symmetrical relationships, collaboration, etc.). Moreover, previous work has shown how much the availability of human support and being a member of a learning community are crucial to successful self-access language learning (Reinders, 2006; Eneau & Develotte, 2012).

The paper provides a detailed description of the design and the implementation of the VLE and its evaluation. The study draws on a body of information gathered as part of a two-week online test session for seven professional advisers interested in developing their abilities to advise language learners in resources centres. The adviser training format is based on the CRAPEL's experience of face-to-face (F2F) adviser training (Bailly, 1995). It allows a blend of various professional cultures and viewpoints about advising practices, perceived as crucial to enhance reflection upon and transformation of practices. The data consist of information collected from pre- and post-questionnaires

and from activity tracks (logs), as well as from analysis of the discourses that participants exchanged inside the peer forum. They help trace the evolution of the training activity of each participant in the VLE and also provide insights into the capacity of the VLE to support training practices based on reflection, participation and collaboration. The results outline the interest of such environment for adviser training and shed new light on the crucial notion of "community of practice" (CoP) for professional development.

2. Theoretical framework and research context

2.1. Learner autonomy and self-directed learning: from institutional settings to the Internet

Learner autonomy in language learning has been studied in the field of research on self-directed learning for over 40 years and is generally understood in terms of both freedom and control. Firstly, learners need some kind of freedom to use their autonomy, so autonomy is in some way linked to syllabus and institutional setting. Nowadays, this point of view is undergoing further developments and analysis under the concept of openness, highlighting the extent to which learners, or trainees, can make decisions about their own learning (Moore, 1997; Jézégou, 2002, 2010). Secondly, autonomy has been defined as a capacity to take control over the learning process, as learners may or may not be able to learn independently and might need to learn how to learn and to be supported in their learning process.

Self-directed learning is a specific way of learning which can be supported, designed and organized by institutions who decide to promote learner autonomy. One of its manifestations is the self-access centre (SAC) (Gardner & Miller 1999), where learners can learn by themselves using a range of resources and different kinds of help. Since the 90s, such centres have spread all over the world, especially in universities and now, along with the development of computer technologies (ICT), interest for learner autonomy has also spread towards online learning environments (Pemberton et al., 2009; Toogood et al., 2004). Today the Internet addresses new questions about learner autonomy in language learning as it provides a context where affordances for language learning are hugely increased. Never before have language learning resources and opportunities to communicate in a L2 been so easily accessible. But learners' ability to successfully use the Internet to learn by themselves is still a delicate issue. They might have the opportunity, the possibility and the freedom to do so, but what about control?

Control in learning refers to the learners' responsibility for their own learning, which means that they take charge of defining their own learning goals and choosing relevant resources and methods both for learning and assessment, as well as having to manage their learning space and time. In order to take on those responsibilities, some learners need a certain kind of meta-cognitive awareness oriented towards language learning, and specific meta-skills such as: the capacity to reflect critically on their learning process and on themselves in the role of learner (including acts, attitudes, habits, behaviour); the capacity to adjust to learning situations (by negotiation with the environment and with themselves), and to deal with their feelings, especially negative ones such shame, fear, frustration, anger, etc. (Gremmo, 1995a). One way to support self-directed learning and to enhance metacognitive awareness of language learning, besides designing specific learning environments dedicated to self-directed learning, is through providing specific human help.

2.2. Teacher training 3 Cs: congruence, community of practice, conversation

Advising is a specific teaching role especially designed to help learners deal with their own learning, and understand their learning experience and themselves as learners. To

do so, advisers help learners with all the questions and obstacles they might encounter. According to Ciekanski (2005), they:

- help learners to sustain their language learning project;
- help them find the most effective way of learning within a variety of learning resources and in particular learning environments;
- support development of awareness of their language learning.

Advising is based on reflection on practices, negotiation of meanings and values, and adaptation to the learner's objectives. SACs or other self-directed learning systems often feature one-to-one discussions with an adviser. These discussions or "advising sessions" have been described as symmetrical interactional relationships (Gremmo, 1995b), and as a space for co-construction of knowledge and action, a transitory space for learners to build their autonomy with the help, advice and close attention from the adviser. As Mozzon-McPherson notes, in terms of skills and knowledge, advisers need a "strong conceptual and methodological knowledge" about language learning and acquisition, but also "active listening skills", as "dialogue is a key pedagogic tool of advising" (2007: 76-77).

As advising skills are rather different from the ones needed by teachers, whose role is to organize learning rather than support it in a very different kind of pedagogical situation based on a different distribution of roles, it is important to design specific content and training modalities to train advisers. Previous research has established the importance of congruence between the content of the teacher training and the design of teacher training environments, especially in online environments (e.g. Comas-Quinn, 2012). As far as self-directed learning is concerned, congruence between content and environment entails designing a training environment and training resources which enable teachers to become advisers by practicing self-directed learning or advising. This is why the training session organised for our research follows the self-directed learning principles described above: trainees work on their own professional or personal computer in the workplace or at home; there is an alternation between individual self-training phases, moments of reflection upon their own practices and communication about that reflection to others. In congruence with these principles, the reflective dimension is at the heart of our pedagogical tenets.

As self-directed learning is still an innovation in most educational institutions (at least in France), advising can be considered as a new professional role and identity that teachers may want or will have to assume. Training practices should focus on knowledge and skills development as well as professional transformation. The acquisition of this new identity is likely to be favoured by interactions with other advisers inside a community of practice that Wenger has defined as "the social fabric of learning" (1989: 251). For Wenger (1989: 214):

A community of practice is a living context that can give newcomers access to competence and also invite a personal experience of engagement by which to incorporate that competence into an identity of participation. When these conditions are in place, communities of practice are a privileged locus for the acquisition of knowledge.

Thus interaction through conversation with other members of one community, whether from the core or its periphery, can lead to acquisition of skills and knowledge in line with various learning theories in the constructivism paradigm which assume that learners learn by restructuring their experience and constructing knowledge, and not by having the teacher's knowledge transferred to them: the sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), the activity theory (Leontiev, 1978) and the scaffolding theory (Bruner, 1996). This has implications for the design of training environments as they should allow space and time for dialogue amongst peers or with experts.

The general design of our training methodology draws on these theoretical assumptions about learning: congruence between the content and the form of the training, learning by conversation and communities of practices as a locus for learning. The training session begins with individual advising sessions where trainees define their training goals with the help of an adviser. Then trainees are invited to visit the website contents to gather the information needed to reach their training goals. Meanwhile, they are invited to communicate via a forum about their own advising practices and training processes, either to ask for support from participants (whether trainers or the other trainees) or to provide support.

2.3. Specificities of the web-based open virtual language learning environment for self-directed learning: the Coalea Project

Coalea is based upon the idea that participants must be able to make their own choices, to reflect on how they learn and to assess their progress. It provides support in a learner-centred approach which fosters self-paced instruction and encourages individual choice: what to learn, where to begin and how to proceed. Such decisions may thus be informed by each learner's own interests and needs. The rich content resources as well as individual support sustained by communication and collaboration with peers and experts are meant to help the users develop meta-cognitive ability and learning awareness.

2.3.1. Aims and approach in the VLE

The global aim of the Coalea (1) project is, as we said above, to promote self-directed language learning through a three-fold VLE dedicated to different participants (language learners, language teachers and LLA researchers) of all levels of experience in self-directed language learning. Coalea was designed to address the question of the evolution of the training of advisers for self-directed learning. Since the 90s, the increasing growth of SAC or hybrid training including self-directed learning has generated needs for adviser training. In the past, adviser training was mainly accomplished in F2F interaction for all the advisers-to-be from a given SAC or institution. Nowadays, (i) it is often economically difficult for one centre to allow the training of their entire staff, and (ii) the staff working in a SAC often includes experienced and less-experienced advisers with different needs in terms of training. Moreover, occasional F2F training often fails to provide support that novice advisers may still need after the training session, once they are actually practicing advising with learners in their SAC. Finally, advising is a situated practice that, according to Lave and Wenger (1991), draws on the experience of encountering and working with language learners in the SAC. To enrich the advisers' repertoire, it is crucial to deal with a variety of learners, advisers and contexts, which can be difficult within a single institution.

The VLE map and contents are specifically designed to respond to the needs of each public.

- The teachers' space provides training possibilities in order to help teachers manage new roles – as advisers or as native speakers – and improve their on-going advising practices.
- The learners' space provides resources, help, advice, opportunities for interaction for language learning and support for learning how to learn. Resources offer the possibility either to complete in-class learning or to facilitate out-of-class learning, at home or in the SAC, addressing different levels of autonomy.
- The LLA researchers' space aims at sharing pre-existent corpora (advising sessions, native speaker / learner interactions), references and research projects, and to create and share new data from the use of the VLE, such as logs and corpora of forum or chat discussions.

These three spaces are interconnected so as to give to participants of various identities the option to consult or create content related to research, teaching or language learning.

The whole VLE project and the interactions between the three spaces are illustrated in figure 1, where the sections and tools already in place for the testing period are colored in grey.

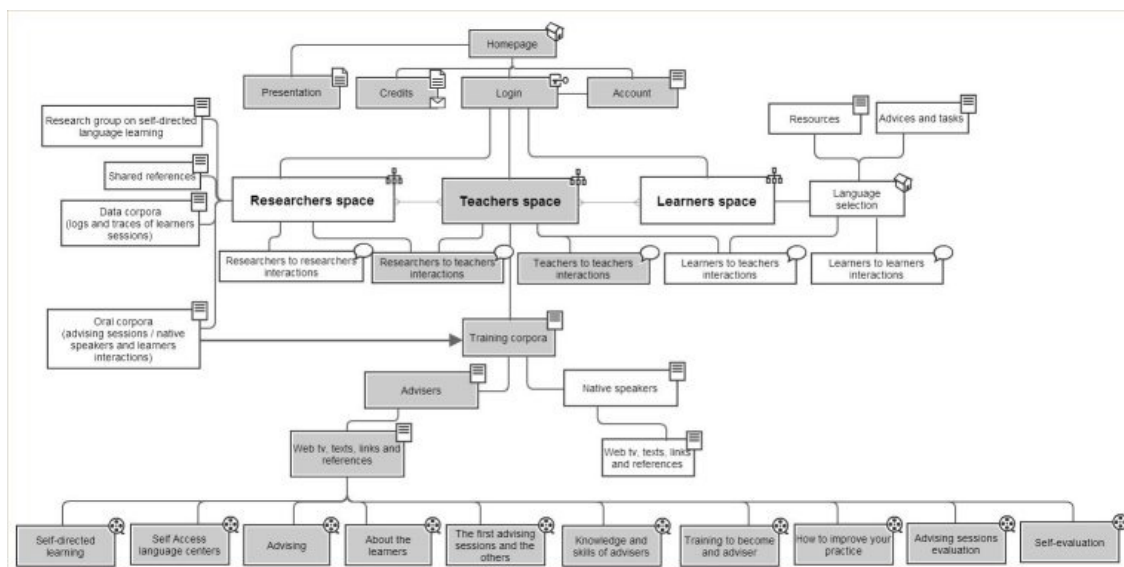


Figure 1. Map of the VLE.

The first step in development concerned the implementation of the space dedicated to teachers willing to develop their advising practices, as described in the following section.

2.3.2. e-advisers' training in Coalea

The space dedicated to teachers provides original resources responding to three different training objectives: How to become a language adviser? How to improve one's advising practices? What place for native speakers in self-directed schemes, and how does their input fit with the advisers' work? The purpose is to propose an open-access companion website which allows regular updates and increased interactivity via a forum enabling online advising. Each participant can tailor the program in advising skills to their individual needs and choose how long, how often, how fast they work with the various resources and activities. The resources and tools created for the website have three objectives. They aim firstly to provide information about the general roles of advisers in a SAC through theoretical material; secondly to illustrate advisers' practices with examples taken from a corpus of authentic advising sessions; and thirdly to support advisers' reflection and awareness of their own practices through a peer forum.

Presenting a new pedagogical role

To help teachers construct knowledge about the new pedagogical role, we created nine different pages, focusing on specific aspects of advising. Those informative sections contain:

- Web-TV resources, specifically created by interviewing experts in the field (researchers and experienced advisers). These videos are scripted and represent almost two hours of content;
- texts and references which broaden and deepen the information given by the videos;
- specific documentation, useful for self-directed learning tutoring (samples of learning diaries, objectives or evaluation grids, case studies, etc.).

All this content can also be accessed via a search engine. This function opens the possibilities for trainees to create a personal pathway which is of utmost importance in order to allow the development of autonomy.



Figure 2. Sample page of the VLE.

Modelling practices and awareness raising

The VLE provides audio and video files of two series of advising sessions with different advisers and learners. Examples of practice are presented in the form of excerpts of five minutes maximum, for a total duration amounting to five hours of recorded data. The excerpts are also searchable by keywords through the abstracts and scripts. This sort of material allows users to draw inspiration from other practices they might find useful and also to construct assessment criteria or standards that can guide them when reflecting on their own advising practice.

Encouraging reflection upon self-practices

It is now widely recognised that learners need support to engage in the process of autonomous learning and transformation of practices. Coalea encourages reflective learning and provides social support for interaction and the sharing of ideas (Eneau & Develotte, 2012; McLoughlin, 2002) as well as feedback through a peer forum for teacher-to-teacher interactions (see Fig. 1). Asynchronous forums are, according to Lamy and Hampel (2007: 107) "the oldest tool in the panoply of CMCL". This "old school" CMC tool however responds to four salient features: (i) it makes low-tech demands on users and can thus be easily adopted by all kinds of participants without technical support; (ii) it allows networked learning through posts exchanged between different individuals, which correspond to the SAC public; (iii) its interaction characteristics fit the communication objective (namely, questions and answers), and posts are displayed to contributors as well as "bystanders" (Goffman, 1981), thus allowing different levels of commitment; (iv) it is a written asynchronous CMC tool particularly well adapted to a refined self-reflection (post length, complexity, formality) also characterized by its reviewability and its revisibility.

In addition, encouraging reflection upon practices may take into account individual dispositions, goals and life histories (Billet & Somerville, 2004). Participants in the training were given three different opportunities for self-reflection:

- at the very beginning of the training, a pre-questionnaire and an online pre-training interview with an adviser helped trainees to set their own goals, diagnose their

- strengths and limitations, and select themes or activities provided by the VLE that seem compatible with their goals;
- during the training, participants were invited to use the forum on a regular basis and to write about their own advising experience;
 - at the end of the experimental training session, participants were proposed to fill in a post-questionnaire for self-assessment of their progress in terms of themes, resources, activities, strategies and skills to develop. Since teachers' self-reflection takes place through a dialogic approach, the peer dialogues also provide opportunities for interaction to negotiate meaning, and possibilities for optimal feedback.

3. Research methodology

3.1. The research experiment context

The training session was launched in 2012 involving a group of seven in-service language teachers already involved in self-access centres or self-directed learning systems. This community of practice involved a heterogeneous network of individual teachers from different institutions (high-schools, universities, life-long learning institutions) and from different countries (France and Mozambique), sharing the same pedagogical goal of disseminating self-directed language learning practices, whether for English (n=4) or French (n=3). The training was provided at distance over a period of two weeks (2). The learning environment functioned as an e-SAC where participants could work on their own and interact with other trainees about advising practices. The self-training was scaffolded by three trainers, all researchers in self-directed language learning, who were also experienced advisers (from five to twenty years of advising practice, mainly in F2F encounters). Trainees were free to use the VLE at their discretion, with no constraint of time or frequency; only the trainers were encouraged to connect to the VLE at least every two days.

The session aimed at professional improvement, exposing trainees to a variety of theoretical and practical resources in order to allow each of them to find their own place in the new pedagogical role. The transformation of pedagogical practices was at the core of the training. In addition, the originality of the training was to provide a specific locus for professional exchanges to share knowledge of advising practices and to reflect upon one's own practices. As in any self-directed training session, there was no pre-programmed syllabus, but rather resources that trainees had to match with their own goals and needs. To do so, the trainees were asked to complete a pre-questionnaire in order to help them analyse their own advising practices before starting the session (see section 2). Again, they were asked at the end of the session to fill in a self-assessment form to review their strengths and weaknesses in advising skills.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

Data were collected from the seven trainees enrolled in the session and the three trainers. They consist of:

- declarative data from individual pre-questionnaires and final self-assessments, included in the training, and from post-questionnaires about the quality of the learning environment and the way it might help them achieve their professional goals;
- tracking of activity within the VLE; as the VLE contents were developed with DRUPAL (3), we used the integrated PIWIK (4) web analysis software to provide logs and statistics about the participants' actions (e.g. downloads or posts to the forum), screen pages consulted and time spent;
- interactions between participants through the different threads of the forum.

The study reports on a preliminary assessment of the usefulness and the affordances of the VLE for teachers willing to develop and improve their advising skills. The analysis was essentially a qualitative process as the aim was to identify individual patterns of

participation in the VLE related to individual training goals, resources and tools used, and changes over time. Focusing first on the forum, the conversational analysis identified themes that emerged in participants' posts related to the type of contributors (trainee or trainer), the type of posts and the type of interaction (in pairs or in group). In addition, to study the forum interaction, we used Walther's (1996) typology and the discourse functions which Sotillo (2000: 84) adopted to explore synchronous and asynchronous written communication, which she defines as "categories of behaviour in electronic discourse, such as requests, responses, apologies, greetings, complaints and reprimands". For the analysis of social interaction and negotiation of meaning, we also looked at the tensions that might emerge as teachers conceive their new educational role and engage in new training practices.

4. Improving advising practices through Coalea

For the purposes of this article, we focus on the use teachers made of the resources and tools available in the environment to improve their advising practices. We concentrate on the affordances of the VLE related to the setting of individual learning in a shared learning environment and to the support that was provided, in particular via the peer forum. To achieve these aims, we analysed each individual's motivations, participation patterns, evaluation of the VLE, and the nature of learning through social interaction on the forum.

4.1. The trainees' background and objectives

One of the specificity of Coalea as an e-SAC for autonomous learning is to allow the achievement of a variety of learning goals through the use of one single environment.

The volunteer participants varied in age (30 to 50 years old), sex (five women and two men), target language (English or French as a foreign language) and professional status (language teacher or language adviser). The trainees were particularly interested in improving their advising skills and in promoting autonomous learning in their professional environment. The session involved trainees with an experience in advising from two to twenty years and who were still feeling a lack of competence while advising. They were working or had worked as language learning advisers in different institutional settings (university, private language learning centre, high-school) in France or in foreign countries, following different advising modalities. All had followed previous F2F training sessions for autonomous learning and advising based on the CRAPEL methodological principles. Some of them were colleagues of the same institution. The majority of them had previous experience in distance learning, whether as a teacher or as a learner. They all had already developed ICT and CMC skills through their daily practices in an ICT-rich learning environment (for a further description of ICT-rich- self-directed learning environments, see Ismaïl & Bailly (2011) and Carette et al. (2011)). In short, the participants may be seen as advanced trainees in learner advising who were familiar with ICT or online learning. In addition, the post-questionnaire shows that they shared similar visions on language, language learning and autonomous learning. However, as shown in Table 2, they had different training goals: to improve the social adviser-learner relationship in the advising sessions, methodological support, advising skills, and out-of-class language learning practices, among others.

4.2. Global participation outcomes

The analysis of the users' logs shows the number of connections, the number and the type of actions on the VLE per screen page (e.g. the page displayed, resources downloaded or posts to the forum) and the total amount of time spent whether on the VLE or on each page per participant, whether trainees and trainers. As displayed in Table 1, in which minimum and maximum values per column are outlined in bold, for all participants (trainees and trainers), global working time over the two weeks amounts to 53 hours. The trainees (L1 to L7) spent a total of about 26 hours (from 30 minutes for L1 to 11 hours for L7) in the VLE, the three trainers (T1 to T3) about 27 hours (from 8 hours for T1 to 10 hours for T3); that is, as much time as the seven trainees did. The number of actions per connection shows that the trainees adopted similar behaviours as language learners in a SAC browsing many resources or focusing on one or two resources related to their training objectives. The trainers acted as moderators (checking new messages on the forum, participation statistics, etc.). Time spent by action shows occasional intervention from 1 to 3 minutes.

	Participant	Total time (in mins.)	Number of connections	Number of actions	Average (action per connection)	Average (mins. per action)
Trainees	L1	30	2	26	13	1.2
	L2	60	10	26	2.6	2.3
	L3	73	10	43	4.3	1.7
	L4	154	4	51	12.8	3
	L5	202	20	94	4.7	2.1
	L6	353	13	213	16.4	1.6
	L7	660	37	314	8.5	2.1
	Average	219	14	109	9	2
Trainers	T1	465	23	400	17.4	1.2
	T2	588	36	614	17	1
	T3	620	18	311	17.3	2
	Average	558	26	442	17.2	1.4

Table 1. Global use of the VLE by trainers and trainees.

The forum was used three and a half times more than the other training contents (resources, videos, articles, etc.), which highlights a strong preference for collaborative activities like the forum over reading information or watching or listening activities.

The three trainers used the VLE almost as much as the seven in-training advisers, which would make the replication of this model very costly for public institutions (trainers spent twice as much time on the website as trainees). But this figure has to be treated with caution as it may have been affected by the strong implication of the trainers who

are also the creators of the web site. Part of the time they spent on the platform may not have been linked to their actions as trainers but rather as researchers and developers. Once the website development is stabilised, it will become possible to assess trainers' activity more accurately.

Finally, information gathered through the PIWIK software shows that participants spent from thirty minutes to twelve hours on the website, revealing different degrees of involvement in the training session. The triangulation of these data with the analysis of pre- and post-questionnaires and the analysis of forum use suggests several reasons for such differences. It appears that the trainees who spent most time on the website were also advisers in practice at their SAC at the period when the training session took place. Those who spent the least time on the website were on holiday and did not have on-going encounters with learners at that time. One of the least involved trainees (L2) was also a teacher who does not work in a SAC, unlike all the other trainees.

4.3. Satisfaction outcomes

Post-questionnaires reveal the trainees' attitudes towards the VLE at the end of the training session. The first thing to notice is that the trainees positively assessed the global relevance of the environment and declared they would all go on using it after the training period expired. Four of them explicitly justified this answer by pointing out their interest in the forum, explaining they would like to pursue the conversations they had started, or use it when faced with a new question or problem in their everyday practice. The post-questionnaire also revealed that the trainees overall found the VLE and the experience interesting and useful. They rated highly positively the forum section, as both useful and interesting. However, two sections of the website were assessed as less relevant than others: the descriptive sections of self-directed learning and self-access language centres (see Figure3). This result reflects the type of participant, globally already well-informed about self-directed learning and supportive of it. For the same reason, they evaluated as highly relevant the sections dealing the practical topics ("advisers' knowledge and skills", "evaluation of advising sessions", "self-evaluation" and "resources"), which is also in line with the trainees' objectives elicited in the pre-questionnaire and the pre-training interview. Because the trainees were already advanced advisers, they were more interested in finding ways to improve their practices than in discovering afresh the paradigm of self-directed learning theory.

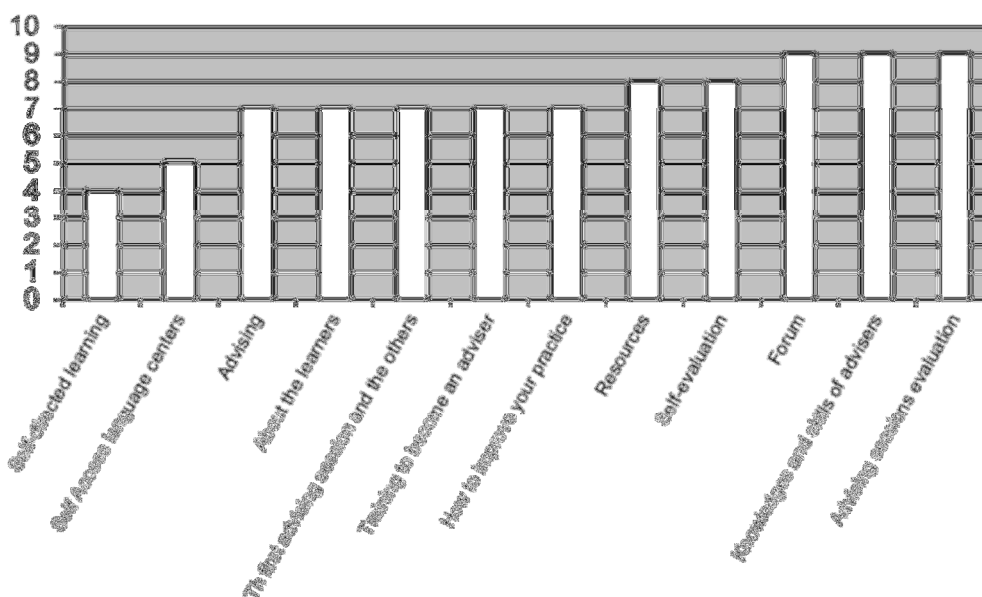


Figure 3. Panel evaluation of relevance of the VLE contents.

4.4. Individual learning paths

One of our assumptions while designing the VLE was that the modular organization of the contents in the website would favor individual paths, depending on the training objectives each participant had fixed. Table 2 synthesizes the trainees' objectives and the types of webpages consulted (forum webpages or content webpages). For each trainee, we also checked the nature of the content webpages visited to determine whether it concerned a variety of subjects or a specific one, and to what extent it matched with individual objectives.

Trainees	Stated objectives	Nature and frequency of web pages visited (forum or content)
L1	Reflecting on one specific methodological question (learner's efficacy and advising).	Mainly forum pages.
L2	Correcting practices, improving efficacy of the sessions on one specific methodological question (learners with specific language purposes).	Almost exclusively forum pages.
L3	Self-evaluation and improvement of advising practices.	Mainly content pages, focused on his objective.
L4	Reflecting on two specific problems linked to her practice (beginners, follow-up of students).	Both forum and content pages.
L5	Developing knowledge about language learning and advising.	Both forum and content pages, with a majority of forum pages.
L6	Correcting practices.	First content pages then only forum pages.
L7	Reflecting on a specific methodological question (learner's evaluation).	Both forum and content pages, with a large majority of forum pages.

Table 2. Trainees' objectives related to preferred webpages (forum or content).

As Table 2 shows, the trainees' objectives are varied and correspond to four types: (i) reflecting on practice, (ii) problems or methodological questions, (iii) self-evaluation, (iv) improving practice or development of knowledge.

A closer look at the kind of actions made by the trainees reveals that only L4 used the forum only once, despite a total of 4 connections and 51 actions (see Table 1). Most trainees shared a similar behaviour during their exploring period of the VLE, choosing the content pages following the vertical order of the list proposed on the home page of the VLE. However, some of them, like L3 for instance, specifically chose to visit content pages related to their training objectives, adopting a more self-directed learning behaviour. It is interesting to note that L3 scarcely participated in the forum, focusing on his own objectives in a relatively independent way from the rest of the trainees. Then, for the majority of trainees, subsequent visits were exclusively dedicated to the forum. L7 is the only one who went on using content webpages throughout her training, but still substantially less than forum pages. Figure 4 displays how she navigated the VLE, taking into account the length of her connection time (in minutes), according to the type of page visited (forum pages appear in white and content pages in grey).

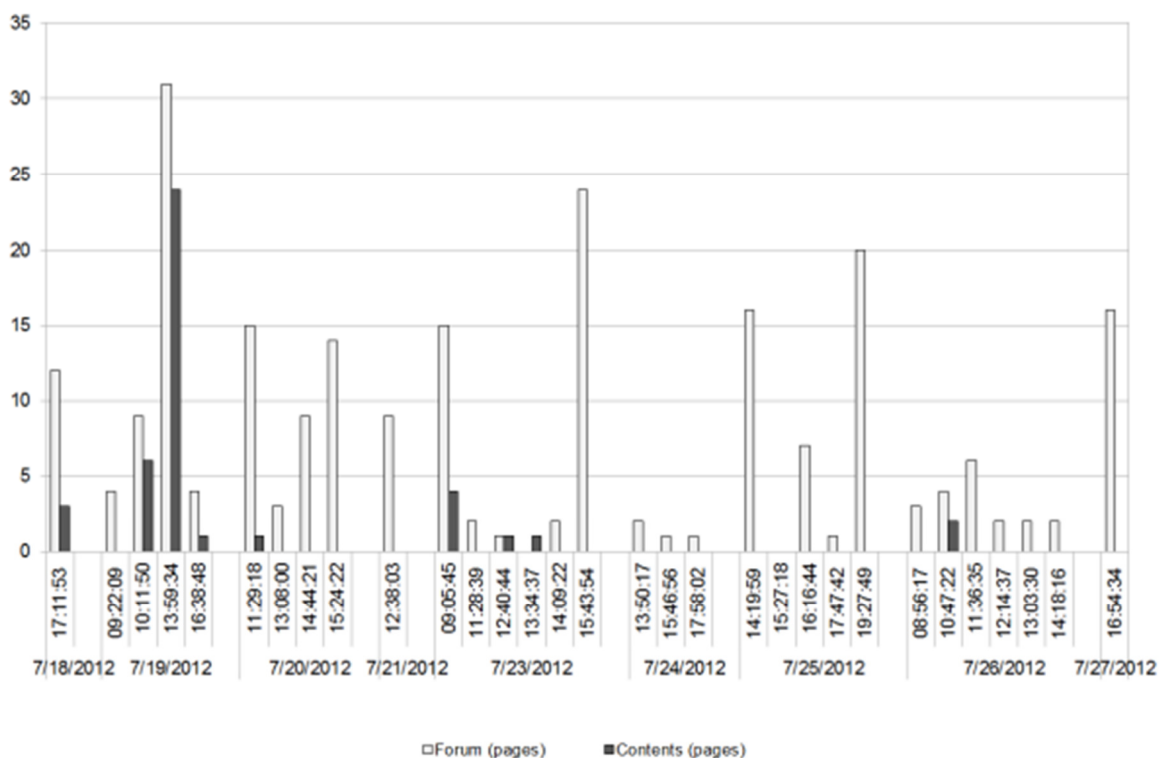


Figure 4. L7's training pathway: forum and content pages consultation.

L7 consulted few content pages (9 connections out of 38), compared to the frequency she used the forum (29 out of 38), but went on consulting them even after her exploratory period at the beginning of the training.

Even though the design of the VLE limited the possibilities for each trainee to build a personal learning path, traces of individual interests and preferences were observed. This tends to indicate a possible personal ownership of the learning environment which may lead to more autonomous learning uses.

4.5. Peer forum as social fabric of learning

This section analyses the use of the discussion forum by trainees and trainers and the nature of their participation so as to characterize the nature of learning and support through this specific CMC tool. Much has already been written about forums. Our approach is slightly different as we will analyse interactions according to the trainees' professional context.

The forum was composed of fourteen threads; the topics corresponding to the previous learning objectives defined by the trainees at the beginning of the training (see Table 2). The participants were free to participate in a thread according to their needs and interests. The forum comprised two main tasks: production and support for others. It also included a convergence task which was to support the development by trainees of a shared understanding of advising practices. Eighty messages were posted during the two-week session by eight active contributors out of the ten participants initially involved in the experiment (the two others mostly behaved as bystanders). The threads developed professional topics such as dealing with one's own emotions or the learners' emotions, how to advise beginners, how to advise during short advising sessions, or how to help learners evaluate their learning. More than 71% of threads show explicit elements of dialogue between participants (names of the trainees are mentioned, citations from previous posts, answers to previous posts, comments on previous posts, etc.). The forum is characterized by a high degree of re-processability which underlines

an improved understanding between contributors, probably due to the short duration of the session which created conditions for high grounding (Clark & Brennan, 1991). Forum discussions attest to an efficient one-to-many communication as well as many-to-many communication. The small number of participants renders coherence easy to maintain, without the visible intervention of a moderator, despite of the large number of threads.

One of the particularities of the forum is that the topic choice clearly shows that participation was content-centred rather than relation-centred (Walther, 1996). There is no friendship-driven exchange here, in contrast to previous studies on pedagogical communication through forums (e.g. Mangenot & Célik, 2004). All participants posted messages in two main domains: defining advising practices and sharing experience. The messages respond to two main functions: to express and disseminate opinions and attitudes on practices, and to provide testimony of advising practices. As far as participation distribution is concerned, 48% of messages were posted by the three trainers whereas 52 % were by five trainees, so the forum may be characterized as a "peer forum":

- less than 1% of the posts were exclusively addressed to the trainers;
- the study of the forms of address highlights symmetrical communicative relationships between participants;
- participants asked for practical rather than theoretical exchanges; no participant answered messages with a strong theoretical orientation, whether they were posted by trainers or by trainees.

The exchange patterns on the forum (mostly question and answer patterns) support the nature of a vicarious learning (Light & Light, 1999). As Light and Light point out, the forum may be seen as a locus for (support-oriented) cooperation more than competition. An important element in peer feedback is that it provides the trainees with assessment criteria or standards that can guide them when examining each other's work.

To conclude, the analysis of the forum exchanges compared against the final self-evaluation report highlights three aspects of how learning via the peer forum was perceived by the trainees:

- it helped them to define and negotiate their new educational role; for example, L7 wrote about the legitimacy of her practices in regards to the definition of the role of adviser;
- they valued sharing experiences as an effective training modality; L2 felt confident and empowered in his new role after having compared his advising practices with those of his peers;
- they valued the social and reflective dimension of the forum so as to sustain both self-reflective practices and help them engage in expanded learning opportunities; L4, who had 20 years of advising experience, felt the forum fulfilled what she still considered as lack of competence in her advising practice, and especially appreciated the way the forum made her explore new issues and opportunities.

5. Discussion and future prospects

Despite certain limitations, in particular due to the choice of participants (all were experienced advisers already familiar with self-directed learning) which sheds little light on the relevance of the pedagogical proposals for beginners, this study led us to several conclusions and many directions for the improvement of Coalea. As Kato (2012) notes, little is known about the specificities of training advanced advisers, despite growing demand. The originality of our study is to work with advisers with varying degrees of experience and from a variety of advising schemes in terms of public, language, setting and country. Our findings have highlighted some of the needs and particularities of

advanced advisers, and pinpoint two main affordances: (i) Coalea allows and supports individual learning paths; (ii) Coalea promotes goal-directed and collaborative action between experts and less-experts, based on the learning dynamic of the CoP.

In short, the results show that participants may work autonomously, coming up with their own objectives and personal learning paths through the various situations offered by the environment. The resources selected may suit diverse degrees of experience. In addition, the online sociability allowed by the forum may answer a specific demand for feedback on practices. Even if the quantitative analysis of each participant's interaction with the environment and with the other participants shows that there is still a certain "danger" of trainers dominating the whole procedure, their behaviour had no incidence on the way trainees perceived the role of the three trainers: they saw them as one kind of support amongst others. Trainees are eager not so much to be "corrected" as to share and construct norms and rules of advising practices through their own testimonies. Advising practice is thus perceived as an on-going transformative process which concerns skills and knowledge (the trainees noted the importance of enriching their repertoire by being confronted with a variety of situations and learners, even through the discourses of others; e.g. L4), as well as role and identity. In line with these conclusions, Brockbank and McGill (2006) mention that self-reflection is not enough to promote transformatory learning, as learning is limited to the insight of individuals, and observing oneself critically is difficult. Dialogue with others offers opportunities to restructure one's established assumptions and beliefs which can lead to further professional development.

The notion of transformatory learning puts the emphasis on the relevance of the CoP as a framework to enrich and improve professional practices. The originality of our study is to focus on a group of participants who share the same vision of language learning and autonomy but who work on diverse settings. Certainly, because the trainees were experienced advisers who had already developed a strong sense of belonging to the professional community of advisers, they succeeded in recognizing themselves as peers in a very short period of time (two weeks). However, as Herring (2005) remarks, an online group is not *de facto* a community. It is interesting to note that the forum threads helped trainees develop key incidents from previous practice which led them to negotiate and articulate norms and rules that they perceived as good conditions for advising. Thus some features of Wenger's (1998) definition of the CoP are of utmost importance in our study: the *participation* and the *reification* through which identity is formed (Wenger, 1998). For Wenger (1998: 55), participation is: "a process of taking part and also the relations with others that reflect this process. It suggests both action and connection". Interestingly, the cases of L2 and L3 show that they may develop a sense of community despite rare contributions to the forum. Participation does not mean doing the same tasks, but rather participating in a common space. For them, having access to a specific environment dedicated to advisers strengthens their feeling of belonging to this professional community. Second, the process of reification –defined as "the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into 'thingness'" (Wenger, 1998: 58)– casts light on the specific role played by the peer forum during the training. The forum allows trainees to be connected to each other, at their discretion. It offers the opportunity for each to (re)define what advising is and what being an adviser means through the production of thoughts and the story of their experience so as to develop and promote shared knowledge (as opposed to 'common knowledge') issuing from the personal experiences that trainees may transfer to new situations (Barbier, 2000).

This exploratory study also raises a certain number of new practical questions, especially in terms of further technical developments. Because of the high interest for

testimonies, we intend to transform the data from the forum into resources for future training. Further technical improvements are under development: embedding language learning modules created with Telos in Moodle courses would open up possibilities for combining a corpus-based focus to content activities with online collaboration and communication. Synchronous tools such as chat and wiki could also easily be combined in the VLE and enrich the social communication offered by the forum, in addition to other Web 2.0 tools. Networks of researchers in language learning autonomy based on web 2.0 tools already exist. It would be of great interest to adapt them to practitioners and to combine them within a training environment.

This preliminary study shows that Coalea is relevant for in-service advisers. To what extent would it be relevant for beginners and advisers less familiar with the language learning autonomy paradigm? To conclude, we have learned that advisers whose listening skills are crucial in the advising sessions were enthusiastic to share a space where they could be heard, probably to offset the often lonely exercise of advising practices. One again, our study highlights the importance of the role of others in the process of autonomy development.

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Notes

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[2] The usual length of the advising sessions provided by the CRAPEL varies from 3 days to 2 weeks according to the needs and means.

[3] <http://drupal.org>

[4] <http://fr.piwik.org>

[Top](#)

Project:

The INTENT Project: Integrating Telecollaborative Networks into Foreign Language Higher Education

<http://intent-project.eu/>

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1. Introduction: Background to the INTENT project

Most of the readers of *The EUROCALL Review* will probably be familiar with the concept of telecollaboration or Online Intercultural Exchange (OIE) as it has been one of focuses of research and discussion over the past decade. Very simply, telecollaborative projects engage groups of foreign language learners in virtual intercultural interaction and exchange with partner classes in geographically distant locations. These exchanges most often involve bilateral projects between classes in two different countries, each learning the other's language. However, they can also involve more complex, multilateral projects involving language learners from many different countries working together online using a lingua franca such as English as a means of communication.

Since the 1990's, foreign language (FL) educators at European universities have used telecollaboration to bring learners into contact with groups of target language speakers with the aim creating opportunities for authentic communication, meaningful collaboration and interpersonal relationship development. Research has shown that this activity, telecollaboration, contributes to learner autonomy, linguistic accuracy (Kinging & Belz, 2002), intercultural awareness (Ware, 2004), intercultural skills (Belz & Mueller-Hartmann, 2003; Thorne, 2010), and electronic literacies (Hauck, 2010).

However, whilst primary and secondary school teachers interested in running OIE projects have been supported by major networks and virtual platforms such as ePals (www.epals.com) and the European Union's Etwinning platform (www.etwinning.net), telecollaboration has received little support in university contexts to date and its impact has been relatively limited.

Various reasons have been identified for this. First, telecollaboration remains relatively unknown outside of specialised research communities such as Eurocall. Second, practitioners who do organise exchanges encounter many barriers, such as difficulty in finding partners, misalignment of academic calendars, differing assessment procedures and divergent attitudes to ICT. An initial small-scale study carried out by this author (O'Dowd, 2011) found that university institutions often view telecollaboration as an 'add-on' activity which relies on 'pioneering' teachers and motivated students and as such, telecollaboration is not considered an integral part of university study programmes.

Some further reasons identified in this study included a lack of pedagogical training available for educators, educators' fear of extra work-load due to lack of support and resources, the Lack of long-term stability in partnerships with other universities and difficulties establishing academic credit to students for telecollaborative activity.

Taking into account this current state of affairs in this area, the INTENT* project was awarded funding by the European Commission's Lifelong Learning programme to carry out a 30 month project. The team emerged mainly from collaboration between members of the Eurocall CMC SIG and many of the team members will be familiar to participants in Eurocall conferences – <http://www.scoop.it/t/intent-project-news>

The team established two key aims for their project:

1. To raise greater awareness among students, educators and decision makers of telecollaboration as a tool for virtual mobility in Foreign Language education at university level.
2. To achieve more effective integration of telecollaboration in university institutions.

These aims reflect the main issues confronting this area of virtual mobility – first, the lack of awareness among educators about this activity and how it can be organised and second, the need to provide practitioners with the tools, training and support necessary to make the activity as effective as possible.

By achieving these aims, the project team hopes to increase the number of students, educators and decision makers who are aware of the benefits of telecollaboration and who will consider integrating it into their educational activities. The next part of this paper focuses on the European survey and collection of case studies which the team carried out in order to establish a clear overview of the levels of use of telecollaboration across European universities, and to identify practical barriers to the take-up of telecollaboration.



Figure 1. The INTENT team at their kick-off meeting at the University of León, Spain.

2. Designing a survey of Telecollaboration in European universities

In order to carry out a representative survey of telecollaborative practice around European universities, the project team undertook various steps. In October 2011, the project team drew up a list of telecollaborative practitioners around Europe based on their own extensive networks of contacts. This list was collected in a database in the project wiki where each group member listed the name and contact email of their contacts. Following that, further potential informants were identified through academic publications, conference presentations and relevant mailing lists. Third, a call for participants was also published on the project website and in various academic mailing lists and relevant social networks asking for those European university colleagues who

had organised telecollaboration in the past or who were interested in this type of activity to carry out the surveys. Colleagues were also asked to share the call widely with other professionals. Individuals who answered these announcements and expressed their willingness to participate in the survey were added to the database of informants in the project's wiki. This database was also to serve as a useful source of dissemination of future activities and publications by the project team.

The survey itself was developed through a process of pre-piloting and piloting similar to that described by Nunan and Bailey (2009: 145). Initial drafts of three different surveys were drawn up by the project members in León and Padua. The three surveys were aimed at: 1) university educators in European institutions who had carried out telecollaboration, 2) university educators in European institutions who had not yet carried out telecollaboration but were aware of and interested in the activity and, 3) university students in European institutions who had carried out telecollaboration during their studies.

The survey was sent initially to approximately 800 educators and a further 200 students. However, the survey was also published on various academic mailing lists and websites, therefore it is impossible to establish how many educators finally received the request to participate in the survey. In total, 543 informants answered the survey. Of these, 341 were university educators and 202 were students. A total of 128 of the 341 educators reported have already organised a telecollaborative exchange in the past. These educators came from 20 different countries of the European Union. The survey findings in the following section are based on some of the data collected from these telecollaborative educators.

3. Survey findings

The survey reveals an interesting overview of the type of online intercultural exchanges which are being carried out across European universities. While it is not possible to go into great detail here, it can be said that European telecollaborators tend to organise exchanges which are bilingual, combining English with another European language and which involve partner classes which are predominantly from the USA, Germany, the UK, France and Italy. Exchanges tend to be relatively short in duration (one-three months) and involve students interacting with just one partner class. Interestingly, a significant majority of telecollaborators report having found their partners mainly through their own networks of personal contacts and colleagues and not through online mailing lists or websites. As regards the aims of their exchanges, telecollaborators tend to give more emphasis to the development of their students' intercultural competence than to their foreign language skills. To develop these competences, the exchanges predominantly involve task-types which engage learners in the 'discussion of different tasks and texts with their partners', 'the comparison of cultural products and customs' and 'personal presentations'.

Some more of the most interesting findings included the following:

- OIEs are strongly believed to have the potential of supporting physical mobility by engaging learners with students in their future host institution before departure, and also by supporting learners during their period abroad. However, there are very few examples of such exchanges currently being carried out.
- Lack of time and the difficulty in organizing online exchanges are seen to be the main factors hindering the take up of these projects by other educators. In many cases the lack of institutional recognition and support was also a factor.
- Telecollaboration can have different levels of integration into study programmes. Most practitioners assess the intercultural and communicative

learning outcomes of their exchanges. However participation in OIEs does not always bring students' academic credit and their work is not always institutionally recognised. The more these exchanges are 'recognised' and awarded academic credit, the more likely they are to be considered of value by students and faculty members.

- The impact of participating in OIEs is seen by students who have participated in projects to be educationally significant. Many reported that participating in a telecollaborative exchange led them to become more open to others, accepting and understanding of difference and to realise that their own points of view are not necessarily "the best or only ones". Many students reported establishing long term friendships with their telecollaboration peers, keeping in touch once exchanges are over and some even visiting one another. OIEs are often an incentive for students to engage in physical mobility.
- Telecollaborative exchanges are recognised by many universities as valuable activities for internationalisation and for the development of student mobility. However, institutions are unaware of the extra time and workload which such projects require and are either unwilling or unable to provide adequate support to staff who wanted to organise such exchanges.
- Telecollaboration is seen as a useful 'first step' on the way to developing physical mobility exchanges between institutions.

4. Welcome to uni-collaboration.eu!

In order to facilitate the take up of telecollaborative exchanges in universities around the world, the INTENT team is currently developing and trialling an online platform (www.uni-collaboration.eu) where educators and mobility coordinators can join and find everything they need to learn about and set up telecollaborative exchanges. The platform includes a wide array of resources and tools including the following:

- Partner-finding tool where educators can announce their classes which they wish to engage in online exchange or simply browse the other classes which are looking for partnerships.
- A databank of tasks and task sequences where educators can find activities for their students to carry out together with their partners.
- An e-portfolio which describes the competences of the telecollaborative learner and which can be used for assessment and self-assessment purposes.
- Training materials which provide background information and materials for any educator who wishes to learn more about telecollaboration.
- A case study databank where users can read about the many different models of telecollaborative exchange.
- A community of practitioners- forums where educators can discuss together their experiences of telecollaboration.
- Interactive features – educators can upload their own tasks, case studies etc and share their work with the community.



Figure 2. Homepage of the INTENT online platform.

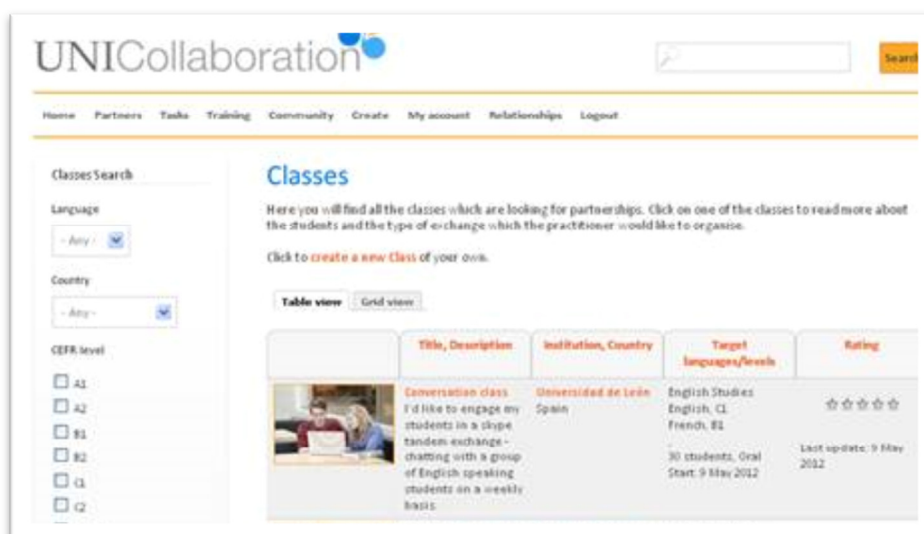


Figure 3. Sample class page from the INTENT online platform.

5. Workshops

2013 we will also be holding training workshops in universities around Europe to inform and support the teaching and learning community as well as related stakeholders and decision makers. Workshops will be held in Italy, France, the UK and Poland. The workshops will be free to attend and aim to provide a comprehensive introduction to university teaching staff, mobility coordinators and management who are interested in learning about organising and integrating telecollaboration into their institutions. To receive more information and to register, visit <http://www.scoop.it/t/intent-project-news> or write to: intentproject@gmail.com.

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NB

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