REVIEWS

Teaching a Foreign Language with Some Technological Help

Sonja G. Hokanson
Washington State University

Reviewing the resources available in technology has finally become an enormous undertaking, because at last there is abundant variety and quantity of good materials widely available. This review will mention just a few of my favorite Spanish, French, and German web sites and CD-ROMs, with a brief description of their benefits and, inevitably, drawbacks.

Text-Associated CD-ROMs

One advantage is that learners can click exactly to the part of the CD-ROM of greatest interest, with no fast-forward or reverse overshoots. They can exit exercises that become stale and move ahead, or review, as they wish. Disadvantages are that CDs can be cumbersome to load or may not load at all on older computers; and slower CD drives may produce incongruous games. I played a couple of games in Spanish which I could not win even though I knew all the right answers and responded swiftly: a definite ego blow!

John Wiley & Sons offers a very interesting CD-ROM to complement its video with *Visión y Voz*, a first-year college Spanish text. The CD-ROM can stand alone, having a variety of vocabulary games and grammar tutorials, with some quicktime video segments that include tantalizing cultural segments as well.

Commercially Available CD Programs

The student compares his or her voiceprint graphically with that of the native speaker! This "biofeedback" approach to accent reduction is now available in the most recent releases from at least three publishers: Learn Spanish/French/German Now! (from Transparent Language), Tell Me More Spanish/French/German! (from Auralog, a company based in France with offices in the USA; there are some "European" aspects to using this one from a fileserver, but it works fairly well on indi-

vidual PCs), and the Rosetta Stone (which also comes in a wide array of languages, not just Spanish, French, and German). None costs more than $50 after rebates, so they are now affordable for most students and they usually come in dual format, for PCs or Macs.

Graphic voice comparison is not foolproof, but it can be a tremendous help to the beginner in foreign language. Generally the student repeats a phrase that a native speaker has just said, usually also reading it off the screen. The visual (graphic) voiceprint of the native speaker appears parallel to the voiceprint of the student. The student can usually tell which sounds do not match up closely, and can focus effort on those sounds. The immediacy of the feedback is a powerful corrective tool, especially combined with the privacy afforded when such programs can be used out of the earshot of others rather than in a classroom.

A drawback is dialect variability which none of the programs can yet adjust for; so, for example, the student who does not use the Spanish "theta" needs to be told to ignore the graphic feedback that says there is something wrong with the sounds being produced for *c* and *z* for some of the programs. Another is the grammar-translation approach to syntax, although in the three programs mentioned above, explicit grammar is mitigated by context-rich, situational response choices based on meaning.

Web Sites

Help Getting Accents and Special Characters in Windows
http://www.wsu.edu/~llrc/llrc_files/accents.html
The site offers clear instructions but is no help in programs other than Windows (it won't apply to e-mail, for example).

Spanish
http://mld.ursinus.edu/~jarana/Ejercicios/
This is a good site for practicing basic Spanish grammar, a specific exercise of which is found at this following extension:
http://mld.ursinus.edu/~jarana/Ejercicios/Self-Check/AR-verbs2.html
The site allows practice of *-ar* verbs and concordance within sentences, 11 of which combine to tell a very short, simple story. Hypertext options not only provide correct answers, but explanations can be found as well. Completed exercises *will* print out, so they could be used for student accountability for having done

them. The disadvantage: who's to know whether the student's friend did the exercises? It won't identify the student.

http://www.studyspanish.com/tutorial.htm

For practicing basic Spanish grammar, this is larger than the site above, and getting more sophisticated with the addition of audio to two of the 42 lessons. The RealAudio Player can be loaded (free) by clicking on an icon at this site. It has the same advantages and disadvantages as the above site; however, answers may not only be printed, but, if registration is completed properly (still free), the computer grades the submissions and will send the results to an e-mail address (the teacher's, if preferred). No ID check is possible here either, so Pablo could be doing John's homework, but it would be an interesting change from class and text homework, so the computer-inclined student is likely to do the work.

German

http://www.academyonline.com/academy/athens/german/index.htm

Grammar translation is embedded in English explanations, but there are lots of them!

http://www.goethe.de/uk/saf/deindex.htm

The site provides resources for language, travel, homestays, and business; and most of the sites are entirely in German.

Glossary of Computer Usage Terms in Many Languages

http://wwli.com/translation/netglos/glossary/spanish.html

The terms selected are indeed common ones and clearly explained in English (only), so it may be helpful. However, I had expected that clicking on "español" would produce at least the Spanish term for the English concept explained: it produces not definitions but only an alphabetized list in Spanish of the translated terms, some of which do not begin with the same letter as the English term. Perhaps this site is under construction and will 1) attach the hypertext to a specific foreign word and 2) translate the English definition to the target language and place it with the term. I found the list of Spanish helpful anyway, even though not matched up well with its English equivalents, be-

cause so many of the terms are cognates, transparently having the same meanings as their English counterparts (I hope).

On-Line Newspapers and Magazines for Native Speakers

Non-natives may also like to guess what the words mean by looking at the pictures! Disadvantages include unpredictable story lines; copyrighted material cannot be legally captured for long; and downloading may be time-consuming, especially if the student logs on during a popular time. On the plus side though, breaking stories may be the same as news just seen, in a native language, abounding in context clues and of high current interest. Quick-time videos in color have greater impact and heighten general interest. Summarizing and reacting to news becomes a necessity if material cannot be captured, giving legitimacy to the assignment. Most computers purchased within the last 18 months have more than enough speed to download quickly most of the time.

Spanish Magazines

http://www.quepasa.com/

The site runs its own news and activities but also includes many hotlinks directly to other similar sites.

www.univision.net

This one offers television show summaries and snapshots, sports, and soaps.

http://www.galavision.com/

Many areas of interest (sports, soap summaries, news, movie stars) are included here, all in Spanish with some translations to English available.

http://ekeko.rcp.net.pe/rcp/rcp-noti/data.htm#diarios

This is a hub of sites, a list of hot-links in/for Spanish with many newspapers and magazines from all of the Spanish-speaking countries. Most of these have fast-loading pictures; many have some form of interaction. "Debates" tend to be just a chronological listing of letters from readers, but some have "cafés" for chatting.

Spanish Newspapers

http://www.lanacion.com/

This daily newspaper from Buenos Aires includes
many fast-loading photos.

http://www.elpais.es/

Many hotlinks and pictures appear with this daily
newspaper from Spain.

http://donde.uji.es/

This offers pictures and interesting bits of informa-
tion from various regions of Spain.

http://www.lostiempos.com/

This daily newspaper from Bolivia includes many
hotlinks and pictures.

http://www.prmag.com/chat.htm

This Puerto Rican magazine provides music! The
viewer can select what kind of background music
to listen to in the chat rooms (three different kinds
of on-line ambience to choose from).

http://www.teachspanish.com/

This is a fast-loading hub of many interesting links,
all in Spanish or with very little English.

French

http://www.pres-net.com/hotfrenc.htm

Here is a hub of sites to art, employment, travel, and
search engines in France.

http://www.france.com/

This also serves as a hub of sites, with almost every-
thing in English. It could be useful for orienting
beginners.

http://www.editors-service.com/articlearchive/france98.html

Although mostly in English, the site provides good
articles about France and things French.

http://www.afsf.com/sites.html

This is a huge hub of media resources with many
links in France, including television clips, audio,
and photos. Even on a 333MHz machine many of

these wonderful sources take a while to load, but they are in French.

Many Languages
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/phf_es.htm
This is a site of special interest culturally. We get a guided tour of the Vatican in any of many languages with options to read, for example, the biography of Juan Pablo II. With a click it can all be in English (or any of a dozen other languages).

There are many wonderful resources now. Send me your favorites and we'll help make them even more popular.