Project

Autonomous Language Learning Project: Catering to Less Widely Used Languages

1. Project description

This article describes the aims and outputs of the Autonomous Language Learning (ALL) project. It describes the challenges and targets of the project from methodological and curriculum development, to activity and platform design. It further collates feedback from the project pilots. Finally it situates the project in terms of material currently available online both in the specific context of the less widely used languages of the project, and, in the broader context of recent technological innovations in language learning in general. The ALL EU-funded project developed blended learning language courses at A2 level for Lithuanian, Romanian, Bulgarian and Turkish. Courses have multilingual access in French, Italian, Spanish and English. Designers and platform developers faced a dual challenge: to innovate in terms of methodology and to innovate in terms of technology. The methodological framework of the project was to develop CEF competence based syllabi and material that promoted student autonomy and collaboration, using a constructivist task-based approach. The languages share a VLE, specifically adapted to the needs of each language. Project outputs include student and teacher guides, on and offline material and printed blended learning sets for each language.

The specific context of the less widely used and taught languages meant that for the project team, at the outset of the project, little or no material was available online and communicative methodology in the target languages was not typical. On the one hand, innovation was almost a foregone conclusion, however, on the other, the challenge was great.

Partners involved included experts in different fields from many EU countries: Centro Navarra Autoaprendizaje de Idiomas, project coordination, Pamplona Spain; Znanie Association, language developer for Bulgarian, Sofia, Bulgaria; Çukurova University, language developer for Turkish, Adana, Turkey; EuroEd Foundation, language developer for Romanian, Iasi, Romania; Kindersite Project, dissemination, UK; School of Lifelong Education and International Development, London, internal quality control; Vilniaus Gedimino Technikos University, and, Mykolo Romerio Universitetas both language developers for Lithuanian, Vilnius, Lithuania.

The ALL project worked in collaboration with another EU funded project, TOOL, which developed courses in Flemish, Maltese, Slovene, Magyar and Estonian. The projects shared expertise and the VLEs for the target languages.

2. Blended learning model

Blended learning is commonly associated with the introduction of new technology into a course, especially the online media, while at the same time it recognises that there is a value in face-to-face contact and other traditional methods of assisting student learning. Sharma and Barrett define it as follows: “Blended Learning refers to a language course which combines face-to-face (F2F) classroom component with an appropriate use of technology. The term technology covers a wide range of recent technologies, such as the Internet, CD-ROMs and interactive whiteboards. It also includes the use of computers as a means of communication, such as chat and e-mail, and a number of environments which enable teachers to enrich their courses, such as VLEs (virtual

3. Curriculum development

Communicative methodology was not in wide use in the target languages. Thus the expression of language learning targets in functional situational terms presented one of the first and greatest challenges of the project. The grammar and vocabulary would flow from a real communicative context and not vice versa. Furthermore, CEF descriptors did not exist in any of the target languages at the outset of the project. Finally, the definition and differentiation of A2 level also represented a high learning curve. It was necessary to train, to read, to write and rewrite, before getting the syllabi to the point where they were in line with the project proposal. Partners opted for the pragmatic solution of using existent descriptors in English, German and French to guide them. The Romanian partner developed the base model for the syllabus, which other language developers used as a reference to guide them.

![Figure 1. Sample learner objectives.](image)

The syllabi were used as the basis to develop the blended course material. Each language course offers learner support documents (student and tutor guides), online material and a blended learning set. In the blended learning sets, learners are made aware of potential learning targets unit by unit. They can consult learning objectives in the blended learning set. Transparency empowers the learner to prioritise and select objectives that are specifically relevant to him or herself.
3.1. Learner Support Documents

A key objective of the courses is to promote learner autonomy. All courses include downloadable student and tutor guides, and a blended learning set. The chief purpose of the support documents is to inform and guide autonomous learning. On and offline material are closely interrelated. The support documents help learners see the possibilities and contents of both and how the different parts of the course interrelate. In the following example from the Lithuanian course, learners are guided through the 'blend'.
The above example from a Lithuanian unit, illustrates the integration of class and online material. The course here exemplifies the cultural dimension to the activities. In the autonomous learning activity we see how technology facilitates the student collaboration and autonomy that are integral to the method.

Partners also included support documents in the form of vocabulary glossaries and grammar references. Alternatively, partners opted to include recommended links and/or references to recommended printed supplementary material. For the webpage, three video tutorials are included to guide navigation and use of the platform.
3.2. Online Part of Course

Each language course is divided in three modules. Online, each course consists of:

- Entry test
- 1 Orientation Unit
- 4 units plus a consolidation unit per module
- Each unit consists of ten activities

One of the key advantages of online material is its flexibility for the learner. As distinct from in-class teaching, the learner may access when and where is convenient for him or her. However, asynchronous learning is not synonymous with solitary learning. Thus while there is a component of traditional self-correcting, automatically answered material, the challenge for the course designers was to integrate tasks that took advantage of the online potential for communication and information. Online tasks present constructivist, communicative task-based activities to promote learner autonomy and collaboration. More traditional activities are also included. Just as languages and cultures were diverse in the project, so were the registers for methodology and course design. Here follow some annotated examples:

Figure 5. Sample forum from the Turkish course.

The example above of a forum from the Turkish course invites participation in a poll. Here learners can express opinions, and read and reply to the opinions of others. It is a communicative task. The following activity from the Lithuanian course is fairly open. It asks learners to comment on communication in shops.
Figure 6. Sample exercise from the Lithuanian course.

Below is an example of an action-based task from the Bulgarian course inviting learners to make use of an authentic link to discover useful language for shopping.

Дрехи

Clothes

За да намерите най-хубавите дрехи, имате нужда от информация за цвят, размер, цена, които...вече съществуват. Само трябва да кликнете в сайта, като използвате речник...

In order to find the most appropriate clothes we will need information about colour, size, price...information which already exists. You just need to click on the web, using a dictionary!

 otra, click here.

Figure 7. Sample action-based task from the Bulgarian course.

Another, more simple matching, culture-based task from the Bulgarian course is shown below.
3.3. Class Material

The class activities are also designed to promote the guiding principles of the project: development of autonomy, peer collaboration and a constructivist, communicative approach. For example, learners are invited to prepare projects based on module themes for presentation in class. Classroom activities include pair work, group work, collaborative writing, role plays... All the classroom activities as recommended in the
sets are available in PDF format, are downloadable within the courses and in printed form.

To clarify how the class activities fit into the overall model of the project, we revisit the model outlined in the ALL proposal:

The blended learning sets for each language respect the project model. The purpose of the set is to facilitate information to the students, in order to help them negotiate the course. Each set gives detailed information, module by module and unit by unit. There are three key sections in the set:

- Online activities
- In-class activities
- Language learning objectives

4. Autonomous learning

A key target in the ALL project was course design that would foster autonomy. The project thus provided a platform, opportunities for feedback and training to help course developers find an answer to the question "how can we design language learning courses to promote autonomy?" Experts trained, provided documentation and carried out in-depth reviews to ensure that quality standards were met. Key among the guiding principles are: learner reflection, learner choice, learner independence, self-evaluation, peer collaboration.

Notwithstanding the project process, understanding, implementation and assimilation of autonomous learning principles varied across the teams. Furthermore, the technology and activity templates were used in different creative ways by course designers.
The Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) itself integrates the concept of autonomy by providing both a learner diary and messaging system on the main page. This is an example of technology in the service of methodology. The degree to which autonomy is later fostered will later depend on the degree to which learners and tutors take advantage of those possibilities. Both platform and course design should lead towards effective course implementation.

As students enter the courses in all languages, they have a diary option. The above screenshots illustrate the diary with support language French and in Italian. This option is distinct from an integrated writing activity; it is the prerogative of the learner and separate from the course itself. The diary is the ideal vehicle for students to reflect upon their individual learning process.

![Figure 12. Bulgarian Student Entry for Diary Tutor View.](image)

Some course designers have guided the use of the diary more and have directed students towards these possibilities in activities which instruct them to use the message system and or the diary to communicate with each other or with their tutor.

ALL course designers use both diary and message to integrate autonomous learning activities. Feedback from tutors for students is thus dynamic and highly personalized. However automatic, 'static ' feedback is also a feature of the project VLE.

Key to autonomy is the value that learning can and most often does take place without the teacher. Self study books that provide answers are familiar to most educators. Online exercises provide instantaneous information about correct answers for students working on their own. The ALL VLE gave information not only to the effect if answers were right or wrong but also identified the correct target item. Ideally activities can then provide links to online material and grammar reference for students to explore in greater depth. At the time of the project, not many online grammars were available in the target languages. However, by 2010, we see that online grammar reference material, with explanation in the target language and in English, is becoming more available in the target languages.
Another type of feedback in the ALL VLE is on compositions with a correcting tool that allows identification of error type and for tutors to make recommendations or comments as they see fit. Following is an example of a tutor view of the platform. It demonstrates how the VLE allows quality feedback for personalized guidance. Tutors can then provide rapid, high quality individualized feedback to the level of detail that they consider opportune, if they are making optimum use of the platform.
The tutor selects a word and colour codes the error. He or she has the option of writing over the error, giving references, and correcting.

The correcting tool was adapted with a specific list of errors to each target language; it was necessary to develop the platform functions to the specific multilingual context of the project. Special keyboards were integrated to the writing activities for Turkish.

4.1. Feedback and pilots

At project outset an evaluation plan was in place. The internal project mechanism and plan for quality assurance and the integration of feedback can be exemplified as follows:

Figure 15. Integration of expert feedback: curriculum development, course design.

Apart from the mechanisms within the team, piloting with all platform and course 'users' was key in the project.

The limits of platform development were not linear or pre-defined prior to the project. Where possible it was the users who defined the possibilities of the platform. This meant that development was ongoing and slower. It also meant that the final product was more creative and a result of a team effort.
5. Dynamic process of integration of user feedback: VLE

Figure 16. Integration of data derived from piloting.

Apart from the aforementioned feedback from the evaluators, teachers and learners supported the project with valuable comments and suggestions. The project collected data from each pilot and questionnaires for learners and teachers involved in each pilot were developed.

The purpose of the pilots was threefold: to inform platform design, to inform course design and to test the blended method. To that end, three pilots were carried out by each language team. Questionnaires giving both statistical and qualitative feedback were used. Data for pilots were processed by each language developer and presented at project meetings. In the final stages of the project the coordinating institution processed all the data from the pilots.

Feedback and the integration of feedback, not just of students but of all platform users were constant in and key to the project. These users included course designers, tutors, teachers and the partners themselves. The entire process informed the outcome of the project. Time was dedicated in every project meeting to the discussion of piloting and to the feedback obtained from the pilots. The following graph shows the number of participants for each pilot:
Pilots were evaluated using the web tool, Survey Monkey, examples of the results are shown in subsequent graphs.

The purpose was to get feedback to improve the design of the activities, to detect bugs in the system, to evaluate the course and comment on the effectiveness of blended learning. Findings were explored at the partner meetings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pilot 1</th>
<th>Pilot 2</th>
<th>Pilot 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bulgarian</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romanian</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuanian</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third pilot and perhaps most successful pilot evidenced the progressively more positive feedback from all users of the platform. The earlier pilots were of great use to improve the material within the life of the project. The focus of the third and final pilot was to assess the blended methodology with particular to focus on the extent which learners and teachers felt autonomy had been promoted within the courses.

5.1. Pilot 3 (Learner’s Feedback: Bulgarian, Romanian, Lithuanian and Turkish)

Feedback from learners’ and teachers’ questionnaires for the 3 rd pilot was, in general, positive. 25 learners collaborated answering the questionnaire for the 3 rd pilot. Though the sample is small, this does not mean it is not representative. For the following questions, 1 is low and 5 is high.
The majority found that Blended Learning was a more effective way to learn a language than those used in the past. However, there is a variation when we observe the Lithuanian Course where opinions were divided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bulgarian 0.00 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.00 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>16.67 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>16.67 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>66.67 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 19. Question 1 Learner Feedback.

Figure 20. Question 2 Learner Feedback.
Almost all the learners considered that Blended Learning was helpful to keep them interested and motivated.

Figure 21. Question 3 Learner Feedback.

Figure 22. Question 4 Learner Feedback.

In general the responses are found in the higher values (4 and 5), especially in the Bulgarian and Turkish courses. In the Romanian and Lithuanian courses, the responses are favourable however they vary more.
In every case the response tends to be positive.
The value of the response about the classes should be noted.

![Pie chart showing learner feedback](image1)

**Figure 25. Question 7 Learner Feedback.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Bulgarian</th>
<th>Romanian</th>
<th>Lithuanian</th>
<th>Turkish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.00 %</td>
<td>0.00 %</td>
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<td>0.00 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.00 %</td>
<td>0.00 %</td>
<td>25.00 %</td>
<td>0.00 %</td>
<td>0.00 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>16.67 %</td>
<td>1.00 %</td>
<td>25.00 %</td>
<td>9.09 %</td>
<td>90.91 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>16.67 %</td>
<td>25.00 %</td>
<td>25.00 %</td>
<td>9.09 %</td>
<td>90.91 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>66.67 %</td>
<td>75.00 %</td>
<td>25.00 %</td>
<td>90.91 %</td>
<td>90.91 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In all the samples the response was positive except in the case of the Lithuanian course where it was more varied.

![Pie chart showing learner feedback](image2)

**Figure 26. Question 8 Learner Feedback.**
In all the samples the response was positive except in the case of the Lithuanian course where it was slightly less favourable.

![Figure 27. Question 9 Learner Feedback.](image)

The flexibility is very well valued especially, in the case of the Bulgarians and the Turkish learners.

![Figure 28. Question 10 Learner Feedback.](image)
The EUROCALL Review, No. 17, September 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Bulgarian</th>
<th>Romanian</th>
<th>Lithuanian</th>
<th>Turkish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>50.00 %</td>
<td>0.00 %</td>
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</tr>
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<td>0.00 %</td>
<td>0.00 %</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.00 %</td>
<td>25.00 %</td>
<td>25.00 %</td>
<td>0.00 %</td>
<td>0.00 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>16.67 %</td>
<td>25.00 %</td>
<td>25.00 %</td>
<td>0.00 %</td>
<td>0.00 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>83.33 %</td>
<td>50.00 %</td>
<td>0.00 %</td>
<td>100.00 %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 29. Question 11 Learner Feedback.

The graph above highlights that the students felt that the course improved their Reading skills especially while their progress in Speaking was not as marked.
It is of interest to emphasize that all the learners would take another course using blended learning methods.

Even though the responses were, in general, positive, it is relevant to consider the variations in the Lithuanian students' answers. These differences could be due to, as Wilson mentions in his Final Report, the background of the students and their previous experience of using online tools. However, it must be highlighted that even the Lithuanian students gave a favourable answer as to whether or not the blended learning method kept them more motivated in studying than other methods.

The first results of the 3rd pilot were analysed during the 7th meeting in Adana, Turkey.

5.2. Pilot 3 (Teacher's Feedback: Bulgarian, Romanian, Lithuanian and Turkish)

For the following questions, 1 is the lowest score and 5 is the highest, except when indicated.

Pilot 3 questionnaire was answered by 8 teachers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bulgarian</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romanian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuanian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even though the sample of the teachers was smaller, the responses tend to be much more uniform than the learners' answers as we can see in the following graphs.
Figure 32. Question 1 Teacher Feedback.

The majority of the teachers gave the maximum mark when valuing the training done in preparing them for the courses. Partners ensured that teachers taking part in the pilots were familiar with the platform.

Figure 33. Question 2 Teacher Feedback.

The teacher’s guide was generally valued positively.
Teachers rated the progress that learners had made with the highest values in the questionnaire.

Teachers were also asked if there were any components of the course that they would have liked more help on. Their answers are shown below:

|            | Suggestion: better and clearer instructions about the writing tasks  
|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------  
|            | Listening in addition to writing tasks- some students may find it difficult to integrate the knowledge at the same time.  
| Bulgarian  |                                                                                      ।
|            | Detailed description on how to start a course in the Teacher Guide, how to correct essays.  
| Lithuanian |                                                                                      ।
|            | I would like to develop my own materials using the tools. I need help in this regard.  
|            | More parallelism with the in-class materials would be helpful.  
| Turkish    |                                                                                      ।

Figure 34. Question 3 Teacher Feedback.

Figure 35. Question 4 Teacher Feedback.
All of the teachers were in agreement that the course offers a more interesting and engaging teaching experience and they considered that the course achieved the objectives related to flexibility and engaging languages courses for students.

When they were asked if they thought that the blended learning course motivated the students more, the vast majority agreed that it did.

These responses were more varied than in previous questions though the option "Easier" was chosen the most.
Figure 38. Question 7 Teacher Feedback.

The results from the teachers were very favourable in this respect.

Figure 39. Question 8 Teacher Feedback.

50% of the sample considered that it required about the same time, while the rest of the responses were divided in the middle range. The reason they expressed that the blended learning aspect of the course required more teacher time than a traditional course was mainly due to the fact that they have never experienced teaching that type of course. This could mean that once the methodology had been learnt, subsequent courses would require less time.
The teachers commented that they would recommend the course due to the following characteristics: Flexibility, Efficiency, Interactivity, Development learner autonomy.

Variety of exercises

Teachers were asked about other specific aspects of the course were they had doubts or suggestions to improve, examples of the comments are as follows:

They suggested more videos, pictures, additional listening and interactive exercises for speaking skills in order to motivate students.

When they were asked if they considered giving blended learning courses in the future, they unanimously responded in a positive manner, indicating that they would due to the flexibility of the course, the use of modern IT tools, the way it combines traditional classes with autonomous learning (balanced system) and the diversity of the tools that enhance learners' motivation. They considered the course easy to use, useful and that it saves a lot of time.

6. Blended State of the Art: Specific contemporary context of online material in the target languages

In 2010, as distinct from the outset of the project, we find courses and material available online in the target languages. However the courses digress fundamentally in their methodological basis from the ALL project. On the positive side, they are characterised by phrase books, grammar reference books, pronunciation rule books, self-correcting grammar and vocabulary exercises suitable for individuals, with random, limited or no online collaboration. In general, the courses do not specifically target communicative competency, no doubt because of the specific methodological tradition and context of the languages.

Materials currently available online for learning Turkish:

http://www.onlineturkish.com

This is a course aimed at individuals at beginner level, material is for self-access. There are self-correcting grammar and vocabulary exercises, grammar reference and vocabulary phrase books. However, the course is not a blended learning course, tutor
and peer collaboration are absent. There are no online collaboration tasks or communication and no face to face sessions.

http://babel.uoregon.edu/ylc/selfstudy/turkish/lessons/

This is a course aimed individuals in four levels. This course focuses on receptive skills. It is a distance learning course, not blended and with access instructions in English. There is no tutor or peer communication or collaboration and no face to face sessions. Learner support is provided in the form of glossaries, grammar rules and links.

Review of Materials currently available online for learning Lithuanian:

http://www.debeselis.net/lessons.php

This material is aimed at beginners, access instructions are in English. There is online reference for grammar and vocabulary. It is aimed at individuals. Its syllabus is Structuralist and decontextualised. It is a distance learning course, not blended. There is an open forum with sections aimed at different languages: English, Spanish, Latvian. There is some online collaboration aimed at the resolution of doubts and random topical commentaries. The course does not present communicative or situational challenges. Learner support is provided in the form of glossaries, grammar rules and links.

Review of Materials currently available online for learning Bulgarian:

http://www.easybulgarian.com

Offers dialogues, audio-input, phrases, self-correcting exercises and instruction and translation to English. This distance course is aimed at individuals. This course does focus on listening skills. The course is designed for individuals.

One-to-one tutoring may be purchased on SKYPE.

Multi-language Platforms:

http://www.mylanguageexchange.com

This is the site which we find closest methodologically to the ALL courses. It has access instructions in English. It provides learners with an opportunity to make contact with other learners and native speakers of the language. However, the material there available might be defined as a haphazard series of resources which might be suited to a learner. The activities proposed in the site take a communicative approach and make use of e-mail, text, and voice chats. It has low-level material. However, to participate in the speaking activities, it affirms that the learner needs to be at least intermediate level. At A2 level, the learner is encouraged to make use of the support material to write e-mails. The site rather provides learners with opportunities for practice and contact rather than providing them with systematic objectives that will take them comprehensively through a level. While vocabulary activities are available in all of the target languages these are not at any specific defined level. In the public site, lesson plans are available in many languages but not in the ALL project target languages.

To summarize, all of the above provide opportunities for learners to work on the languages by themselves. The ALL courses stand apart precisely because they are not pure distance; they are blended. Level and learning targets are defined and transparent in the courses. The ALL courses can be used by individuals but they are designed for groups and guide the learner towards collaboration within a group, on and off line. Self access is not equated with the development of autonomy in the courses. Expert guidance takes two forms in the ALL courses. Firstly, there is free-standing automatized
feedback and guides typical of static multimedia courses (as in some of the other online material itemized above). The second type of feedback, is more specific to the ALL courses in the target languages, where there is dynamic feedback provided by an expert tutor, who gives guidance either online via message or in class, within a course, it is personalized feedback directed at a specific learner, in a particular group, on a particular course.

Other language platforms:

A site such as www.Babbel.com provides courses in seven languages, not target languages. Such a site might be what any language blended or pure online solution might aspire to. The company is well funded and this no doubt helps its attractive presentation. The public site indicates that is lexical and functional in focus and that it includes grammar activities. It integrates mobile learning and Web 2.0 technology making use of APPs and social network sites. Interestingly, there is a latter day trend away from free online material, to provide tutors and Skype sessions.

Rosettastone.com provides courses in one of the target languages. It provides attractive audio and visual material in CD format for Turkish and it is aimed at individual learners. It stresses meaningful context, as opposed to deductive input as the best basis for learning language. Feedback on this course is static.

In a similar vein, www.livemocha.com, provides a well organized network for learners to find people with common language interests. The site has millions of users. Tutoring and composition correction can be bartered from language to language using a points system. You may set up your own language exchange with your online pals on the site. The idea is attractive and effective if you wish to study one of the languages for which material is available. In terms of the target ALL languages, to date only Turkish courses are available, some precisely if not comprehensively at A2. However, you may find people with whom to set up an exchange. As a weakness, we may note that the same material is available for every language, so the material will separate language from any culture specific reference.

By contrast, the ALL courses are replete with activities that are focus on aspects of culture of the target languages: music, food, poetry, places of interest in the target language, festivals, and famous people. With over one hundred and fifty activities in each course, it is difficult to do adequate justice to the volume of culture-based activities. On the theme of traditional food, to take just one example, we find examples of culture focused activities, used in different ways by the designers.

In the following example (see Figure 41), from the Turkish course, learners are invited to watch the video, learn the recipe, reorder the instructions and finally rewrite the recipe using some simple linking words.

---

**Kaşar yapalma / Let’s make kaşar**

Bu lezzetli Türk mutfağının çikin yaz_lexen yerinde rınıvermiyor. Bu lezzetin hem eden hem de yemek birlikte التطبيق konusu olarak yemekleme, birikme ve birikme ile de birikme kullanmasına uygundur.

**Instruction**

Aşağıda Kaşar yapalma (kaşar yapma) ve alternatif bir yöntem ve alternatif bir yöntem kullanarak örneği yazınız.

**Writing and Projects**

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Figure 41. Example activity from the Turkish course.
The Lithuanian course writer asks students to read a traditional recipe and to decide whether statements are true or false afterwards (see Figure 42).

**Figure 42. Example activity from the Lithuanian course.**

The Romanian course writer invites students to do an activity similar to that of the Turkish course writer, listen, reorder and write.

**Figure 43. Example activity from the Romanian course.**

The Bulgarian course writer, in an activity more similar to the Lithuanian course invites students to read and do a comprehension exercise on a traditional recipe.
Figure 44. Example activity from the Bulgarian course.

All of these activities are ideal preparation for an in-class cookery show, for an online vodcast or for students to create any collaborative project based on preparing, demonstrating or eating the dishes!

Leaving aside specific cultural references, all of the above sites offer material of interest and noteworthy of comment. However, in general terms we see that the ALL courses do something quite distinct and quite specific: they take students through a full A2 level. The ALL courses are specifically designed and set within the target language cultures, they make use of high quality tutoring, they are courses in the most traditional sense they have a beginning and an end within a predefined time scale and with a predefined group. They are not open-ended and the groups are not open to the planet, with people who drop in and out whenever they want. Having looked at examples of some material currently available online in target languages, we now turn our attention to the broader context of technological innovation in a global context.

Leaving aside the specific context of the target languages, how innovative are the methodology and the technology used in the ALL project?

7. Use of Video and Vodcasting

Upload of video files is possible on the ALL platform. The VLE in ALL is on par with current technological possibilities. Partners have made and uploaded video for the courses. Student videos on pilot courses have also been uploaded by tutors. Partners have also taken advantage of YouTube. Over the past five years, Web 2.0 has allowed for a democratization of content. The key implication of this is that course content is not the sole preserve of course writers. In the ALL VLE, upload to the courses is principally mediated by tutors and course writers. However any student video from a site such as Vimeo can be linked in directly to the course by students via message and forum. Collaborative project presentations form a set and standard task in every module. These project presentations could easily integrate periodic vodcasting.
8. Teacher Training in CALL

The ALL courses are for use both by students and tutors. While teacher training was not within the direct scope of the project, partners provided guides and training in the use of the platform to teachers involved in pilots. In her article on training teachers in CALL, Dooley (2009) makes valid observations and sensible, practical suggestions for both inexperienced and experienced teachers. On the issue of teacher skills and training in ITC, she states “...recent studies into teachers’ use of new technologies show that, on the whole, teachers have only recently begun to integrate the use of ITC tools to their teaching practices, and in most cases their use of ICT does not include network-based collaborative projects or any real attempts to use Web 2.0 for learning purposes (BECTA 2008; Greenhow, 2007). Clearly, there appears to be a gap between teacher training that aims to provide “isolated coursework in CALL” and a focus on “the development of a sequence of situated technology experiences for teachers”. The ALL courses bridge several gaps. The first is the gap between online exercises and network experiences, to which Dooley here specifically refers. Both are to be found in the ALL courses. Another gap for students and teachers alike is between digital material and printed material. That the media for the ALL blended sets is paper is deliberate. It is printed because paper is familiar and tangible but the information there correlates and links to the digital units.

Meanwhile the online units are bridging another gap. The online units help tutors and students make the transition from teacher to student-centred learning and from in-class collaboration to online collaboration. While there appears to be consensus that collaboration online is a great advantage and principle benefit of the potential for ITC in teaching, Stickler et al make a key point with respect to teacher training: “Collaborative learning has thus come to be part of the new literacies (Richardson 2006) that learners as well as teachers require to engage successfully in today’s educational contexts. Critical factors for teachers include fostering learners’ collaborative skills, especially at sociocognitive level; prompting students' critical thinking (Engstromm and Jewett 2005:
and knowing when and how to intervene (Mangenot & Nissen 2006: 616). Yet teachers often do not possess these skills to support collaborative learning (Mangenot & Nissen 2006), and although training has been shown to be of paramount importance (Hampel 2009), it is still rare to find comprehensive training programmes.” Thus the course design itself attempts to integrate collaboration. As has been demonstrated, the ALL language courses lead the learners to messages, links, forums but also to books and class. So that it is accessible and plausible, in the ALL courses, tradition meets innovation half way.

9. Sound files, Podcasting and Mobile Devices

The ALL VLE permits upload of mp3 sound files. As in the case of videos and vodcasting, we can comment that course content is principally uploaded by course designers. In the absence of material for A2 level, partners created their own sound files and uploaded them in the units. Podcasts, however, are a step beyond a sound file; they are released episodically and often downloaded through web syndication. They are the ideal vehicle for student-produced sound files or student-selected sound files. In their article on MALL Technology, the authors distinguish between podcasts that are supplementary to courses and those that are integrated to the course curriculum and requisites, recommending integrated podcasting. The ALL platform allows for the upload of sound files syndication and syndication to podcasing, a feature which course designers made use of. As above, collaborative project presentations form a set and standard task in every module. These project presentations could easily integrate periodic podcasting.

10. Mobile blogs in language learning

With respect to the accessibility of mobile devices Abdous et al (2009). are refreshing: “Although technology is now relatively inexpensive, students living on limited budgets may not be able to afford to purchase an iPOD or MP3 player in order to access podcasts developed for their courses.” They take into account the financial reality, context and mentality of the target students of their study. From analysis of data obtained from 113 students enrolled in language courses, they comment that “It appears that some students prefer to use a device which they already own (ie; a personal computer) to download media, such as podcasts, rather than to purchase another device for use as a study tool.” In terms of the relevance of material developed for the ALL project, such considerations are important. Innovation that ignores the price of the media it is using in terms of average salary, or that is not measured against such a factor will ultimately be irrelevant to the target users. Ultimately, as Abdous concludes, mobile devices will become cost and time effective for learners. In 2009, the authors conclude with respect to MALL: “These technologies will eventually be incorporated into classes in all academic departments at colleges and universities.” The ALL project, as proposed in 2006 principally situates its course design on PC. However, the VLE allows students to download any sound file they wish to a mobile via USB or Bluetooth.

Comas-Quinn (2009) et al. present a little gem of a project, which is eminently practical and inspiring for language learning, teaching and course design. Students of Spanish take a trip to Santiago. While there they participate in the Santiago Blog. “Encouraging the learning process to take place in an informal setting (the town itself, where the foreign culture could be experienced without tutor mediation) is another one of our aims. We invite students to be alert to what is happening around them, ready to identify the images, sounds or situations that they found interesting, puzzling, amusing or ‘shocking’, and that they deem worth recording. Mobile devices then provide the means to capture those cultural experiences “on the spot”, as and when they happen.” These are later uploaded to a blog and commented upon. Their first pilot combines distance learning, blogs, online communication, cultural immersion. Interestingly the Open University UK that carried out the project is about to adopt a blended tuition model using some of the technologies in the project described.
In their conclusion the authors allude to a problematic inherent in blended learning, using new technologies as they exist in 2010, "We believe that there is an unresolved tension between our desire to involve our learners more actively and centrally in the new learning environment, and their need for reassurance, guidance and direction to allay their anxieties." This observation is also pertinent to the ALL project. Course design that promotes autonomy does not mean everything is up to the learner, it starts from wherever learners may be and brings them to a point where they are comfortable collaborating and constructing their own knowledge. Independent learning does not mean dispensing with the tutor. In 2010 it means that tutors operate in a blended context, not only face to face, just as the course and platform design sets them up to do in the ALL project.

11. Blogs

In her excellent article, Dippold (2009) discusses the dialectic concerning the use of blogs for language learning. When used for 'peer review' she warns of the danger that the use of blogs turns into an essentially critical, traditional, error-focused and tutor controlled vision of language learning. She suggests that they are better employed in a mode closer to their genre, as student-centred, online diaries for the purposes of peer collaboration, problem solving and production. As is common with respect to the use of almost any new learning technology Dippold concludes that “more intensive training for both tutors and students is necessary to enable both sides to exploit the medium to its fullest potential. Moreover, both students and tutors need to be ready to abandon traditional roles and writing models in order to be able to fully engage with the medium.”

Although partners trained piloting teachers in the use of the platform and its possibilities, it was outside the scope and time frame of the project for them to dedicate time to training tutors in the specific use of blogs. The ALL VLE does provide a space in which students can freely express and directly publish their opinions. However, within the environment, student generated themes need to be uploaded via the tutor. If learners wish to move outside the ALL VLE, to a free online facility such as Wordpress, it is easy to involve other group members via a link in the ALL platform. The value of maintaining a blog within the learning environment, means that group integrity and privacy are preserved. This may also be achieved relatively easily using the free Web 2.0 software but it does presuppose a degree of technical and administrative know-how, or time spent gaining it. In the ALL platform this responsibility is taken away from the learners, and even from the tutors, making use very simple.

12. Conferencing

In an academic context for trilingual students using language at what appears C2 level rather disparate to A2 second-language level, Kosunen (2009) analyzes participation in an online conference and its implications for university course design. Her final conclusions, however, may have some parallels with and implications for the ALL project experience. As she draws her conclusion she comments “In terms of the traditional dichotomy of speech and writing, which characterizes speech as active, dynamic, concrete, spontaneous, narrative, social and dialogic and writing as reflective, synoptic, abstract, scientific, paradigmatic, individual and monologic (WELLS, 1999: 146) participants in computer conferences would in my line of reasoning, seem to include towards a speech-like mode of discourse. The challenge for the educator, in this respect, would be to find a proper task for asynchronous computer conferencing in the overall course design.” In the ALL VLE, designers have recognised that conferencing is by function, a task that is closer to speaking than to writing. This is why the platform includes voice recording with forum tasks. Furthermore, ALL course designers use forums to request students to express opinions, not to summarize or to clarify, as is recommended by Kosunen.
All forum activities allow students to record their voices. Course designers chose to use forum activities because they were an excellent way to promote online communication, while giving the students practice in integrated skills. 22 forums are available in the ALL language courses, an option used more by some language developers than others. Two examples of online communication tasks using the voice recording feature follow:

13. Conclusion

The context and resources of less widely used and taught languages place already endangered languages at a disadvantage in terms of innovation. Therein lies part of the value of the ALL project. It situates Lithuanian, Romanian, Bulgarian and Turkish at the edge of developments in language learning methodology and technology. The project takes its own route, while many interesting developments are taking place in the world of online language learning, the ALL project takes an eclectic approach to them. All that is new is not necessarily all that it better. For example, online collaboration is positively embraced by the project designers. However, in the ALL project, that collaboration is guided and set within the context of a course; it is not totally free and up to the student. Students may pick and choose from a series of proposed activities, but by doing the totality of the activities on the course, students will be taken through not just random aspects of the language, but a full level of the language. The freedoms inherent in Web 2.0 at face value may render tutor guidance regressive or out modish. However, the project team would contend that it is at the very least a quality, if not a necessary, aspect of the learning in the ALL courses. Learning will take place without a tutor, just as learning make take place without a course. However both courses and tutors foster autonomous learning in the ALL project. For further information about the ALL project, visit www.allproject.info.
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