ReCALL Journal

From 2007, ReCALL will appear three times a year, in January, May and September. This will provide an opportunity to publish occasional Special issues, the first of which, *Integrating Corpora in Language Learning and Teaching*, will appear in September 2007. A further Special issue on Mobile Phones is also planned.

The forthcoming issue of ReCALL (Vol. 19, Part 2) will be distributed to EUROCALL members in May 2007. Please send articles, software reviews, details of relevant events or other items of interest for future issues to June Thompson, Editor ReCALL d.j.thompson @ hull.ac.uk.

The journal contents are listed at:
http://eurocall.webs.upv.es/index.php?m=menu_04&d=r_contents

All articles are considered by an international panel of referees. Notes for contributors can be found at:
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Projects

OUOcoursebook.com

An organic, universal, online coursebook (OUO)

http://www.ouocoursebook.com is a pilot website designed as part of a language learning materials development research project at the University of Limerick, Ireland.
OUO - which stands for 'Organic' 'Universal' 'Online' - is an online coursebook with a 'text-driven approach' (Brian Tomlinson e.g. 2003: 110) which has set out to compile and offer texts and learning materials from a range of EIL cultures; hence its universal tag. The online interactivity in this coursebook is in the compiling of the material rather than within the materials themselves. The OUO coursebook is authored collaboratively in that teachers/materials writers access the site online and upload teaching materials, growing the coursebook organically; and teachers can equally download and print materials for use in the classroom. In order to make the materials as versatile as possible, they are available in Word, so that they can be customised, as well as pdf format.

Background and rationale
The OUO coursebook is proposed as one possible solution offered to the twin problems perceived as bugging the traditional printed global ELT coursebook: cultural inappropriacy, and dating. The present trend towards publishing coursebooks for local markets is tacit admission of the failure of the global coursebook to embrace the diverse needs of international EFL/ESOL/EIL markets. The problem of dating, on the other hand, is inherent to the print-based medium. Even by the time a new ELT coursebook hits the shelves any of its potentially most interesting content is dated. Attempting to avoid the problem by addressing topics with long shelf lives - 'the environment', 'the developing world', 'sport', 'the media' - backfires in terms of their potential to generate interest and engagement.

Having an online presence combines the advantages of the new technologies - up to date content; updateable, continuously-regenerating materials, and accessibility; with the appeal of a 'local' textbook, through its growing collection of locally produced materials generated by local practitioners 'on the ground' in different EIL countries.

Description
The key feature of OUOcoursebook.com, is that it is collaborative and authorable, and in this sense has some of the features of a wiki, although users do not work directly on the same document. Teachers/materials writers can submit learning materials to the site:

at which point the material goes to the administrator who approves and/or edits it, and then uploads it to the site. A key aspect of the specifications given to the developer of the site was that the material should be available to the user in pdf format (for a professional appearance) as well as in MSWord (to allow the material to be customized
by the end-user, i.e. teacher). Material can be uploaded in either format but the administrator converts the submissions so that both formats are available to the site-user.

**Materials template**
The OUO is conceived as a coursebook, albeit with a text-driven syllabus rather than a traditional grammar or content-based one (see below), and to prevent it being just another collection of 'ready-to-go' materials, a structure for the units is offered (although not imposed), in the form of a materials template. This structure was designed to be as approach-neutral as possible but the author was aware that it would inevitably be imbued with her own teaching and cultural background which is why it is only 'suggested'. It is hoped that alternative 'templates' might emerge from contributions of materials from different cultures, and which can then be added. As it stands at the moment, there are frameworks for two main activity types: text-based and task-based, although the two might be used in tandem:

Both frameworks move from traditional 'warm-ups' through response and other activities and culminate in language awareness activities. These last come together to form the language 'syllabus' which thus grows organically out of the materials covered (see **Pedagogical Issues** below). In keeping with the organic aspect of the coursebook and in order to maximise versatility, a comments button beneath each unit allows users to add feedback on the material; depending on its nature, this feedback may prompt revision of the material (by the administrator or author), or may simply be comments that are useful for other users.

From the point of view of the user, materials are available as units and in keeping with the universal-local ethos of the coursebook, are categorised by country of origin.

**Technical specifications**
The website was written using the Active Server Pages Plus (ASPX 1.1) scripting language with SQL to access the MySQL 5.0 database. These technologies allow visitors to quickly and easily query the coursebook, download the materials and then post feedback. They also allow for easier administration of the website as the process of submitting materials is automated.

At present, the design uses the older technique of using tables to position the elements on the page. Through the EUROCALL discussion list, it was pointed out (by Stewart Arneil) that there is a much more efficient and powerful method of doing this which will
also provide for greater accessibility to those with visual impairments (this aspect was pointed out by Fred Riley). The website will be redesigned to use Cascading Style Sheets to position elements and to fully control the presentation aspect of the website. New features and functionality will also be incorporated as users provide feedback and offer suggestions.

**Pedagogical issues**

1. **What about the syllabus?**
   One of the issues faced in the design of this website as a ‘coursebook’ is that of the syllabus. Unlike a coursebook syllabus which is imposed on the learner, learning through the materials on the website (or indeed, any set of authentic or semi-authentic texts) makes for an ‘organic’ syllabus that arises out of the language work done with the texts. The syllabus is thus ‘text-driven’ (see Tomlinson 1998: 147, Mishan 2005: 59) rather than the other way round (as is common with traditional coursebooks).

   The rationale for this draws on L2 acquisition research; to be very brief, with reference to concepts such as; Interlanguage whereby learners construct and continually revise their own conception of the target language grammar (Selinker 1972); the concept of language acquisition as an organic process, more like growing a garden than the linear, ordered and cumulative model underlying the traditional syllabus (Nunan 1998:101-2); the teachability hypothesis which posits that learners acquire only those structures that their interlanguage is primed to acquire (Pienemann 1985: 37); constructivism and the idea that learners take on board what is relevant and useful to them; the noticing hypothesis i.e. that noticing is essential for converting input to intake (Schmidt 1990).

   This last, is, of course, central to corpus-based approaches to language learning e.g. data-driven learning. It was also one explanation for the early success of language learning via the new technologies (e.g. Warschauer 1998), i.e. the fact that learners were simply reading more (e.g. on email and the web) and thus noticing language features more, in particular features of oral language which hitherto had not been so easily available in the written mode.

   The key feature of the text-driven syllabus is that it is customised and unique: it emerges from the set of texts selected for a particular class having particular needs and in a particular setting. Texts can be selected -by the teacher or students- on the basis of age/cultural-appropriacy; the appeal of their subject matter; their language content and challenge; the types of activities built around them, and so on.

2. **What about language proficiency level?**
   Materials available on the site are deliberately not classified by 'proficiency level'. The principle is that it is the task that is graded to suit the proficiency level of the learners rather than the text; the texts posted on the site are selected on the basis of being as broadly applicable as possible (if appropriate, an indication of proficiency level may be suggested). This means not only that lower level learners might get to work with more challenging and motivating texts, but that more proficient language users might work with texts that present not so much linguistic as intellectual challenge.

**Progress of the pilot to date: the 'ohnonotantherEFLwebsite'-effect**

The main design fault in this project is that it makes or breaks on contributions from others. Lack of interest has partly to do with saturation, the 'ohnonotantherEFLwebsite'-effect - people are inured to the catalogue of web sites - however alluring- arriving daily into their inboxes.

   One of the objectives in designing the site was to integrate it into the MA ELT programme which the author lectures on at the University of Limerick, Ireland [http://www.ul.ie/~lcs/programmes/postgraduate-programmes/ma-elt/](http://www.ul.ie/~lcs/programmes/postgraduate-programmes/ma-elt/). Students on the MA will be asked to contribute materials as part of the materials development module which is offered as an elective. The site will also be inaugurated at the ELT Materials Symposium and Conference, Perak, Malaysia in February 2007 [http://www.micelt.com.my/](http://www.micelt.com.my/) where local teachers will be invited to develop and upload materials to the site during a hands-on session.

   In conclusion, as an ongoing project, feedback and contributions are most welcome! freda.mishan@ul.ie
References


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