

The Use of The Internet in Teaching The English as a Foreign Language

By

Hutheifa Yousif Turki

M.A. Assist. I. in Linguistics

University of Anbar / College of Education

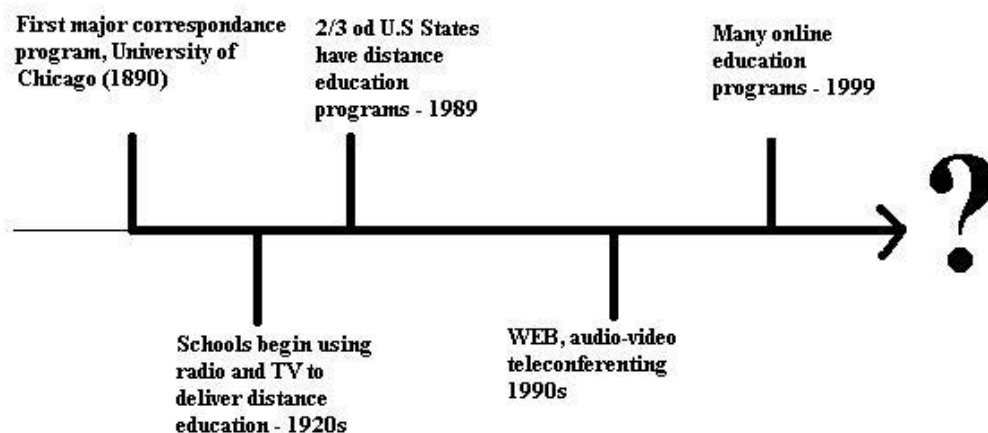
Abstract

A vast and largely untapped resource for foreign language learners has recently become available: native speakers of languages being learned who have access to the Internet. To explore the potential of this new resource for foreign language learning, the researcher reviews six free programs for Windows and Macintosh computers that permit synchronous audio (and some video) communication via the Internet. It was found that although the audio (and video) quality varied both among and within the programs under review, the communicative contexts created by these programs can provide foreign language learners with an inexpensive means for useful audio interaction with native speakers of their foreign language. The aim of the present study is to set a background for further reading, acquaint the reader with the role of distance learning in the development of education and take into consideration the advantages and disadvantages of using the Internet in teaching the English as a foreign language .

1- The history of distance education.

It is important to understand the history of distance education since it shows that there were many historical paths of developing it and the evolution path that the distance education has undergone has not been easy. Throughout its history the distance education has faced many problems connected with its acceptance and implementation as it happened when

there were many attempts to introduce very first medium used for this purpose



any form of educational innovation (Nasseh,2007:35)

Figure (1) Distance learning timetable

The very first and earliest form of distance education that was introduced in 1840 was correspondence education (the earliest version of distance education). This form of education developed first in Europe (Great Britain, France and Germany), then in the United States, and spread swiftly. An English educator, Sir Isaac Pitman, taught shorthand by mail (Encarta). To give educational opportunities for women, in 1873, Anna Ticknow established a society that allowed women of all classes to study at home. Ticknow's Boston-based, volunteer endeavor provided correspondence instruction to more than 10,000 students over the course of 24 years. Communication, teaching and learning all took place through printed materials sent through the mail (ibid.).

In the course of time the media was the means of distance learning. The

was radio then television and most recently the internet. As the Internet becomes widely used, it has given many new opportunities to teachers as well as students providing them with materials such as records, articles, books, and more recently sites designed especially for distance learning and teaching. These include ready made exercises and tests, as well as materials prepared for learning particular skills like speaking, writing, listening and reading (ibid.).

2. The history of the Internet

The history of the Internet can be traced back to the early development of communication networks. The Internet evolved through a large number of stages from a computer network intended to allow general communication among users of various computers to the form we know it now. The melting pot of developments brought together the network of networks that we know as the Internet. This includes both technological developments and the merging together

of existing network infrastructure and telecommunication systems (ibid.:36)

The infrastructure of the Internet spread across the globe to create the world wide network of computers we know today. The internet first appeared in West and then spread through the world entering the developing countries. Thus creating both unprecedented worldwide access to information and communications and a digital divide in access to this new infrastructure (ibid.:37).

At the very beginning the Internet was very difficult and complicated in use. So the early Internet was used only by people who were trained to use it, like computer experts, engineers, scientists, and librarians. Since there were no home or office personal computers in those days, anyone who used it had to learn to use a very complex system (Singhal ,2007:17).

However, the Internet was not originally called the Internet. This name was given to it on October 24, 1995,a resolution defining the term Internet has been passed unanimously. This definition was developed in consultation with members of the Internet and intellectual property rights communities.

RESOLUTION: The Federal Networking Council (FNC) agrees that the following language reflects our definition of the term "Internet". "Internet" refers to the global information system that -- (i) is logically linked together by a globally unique address space based on the Internet Protocol (IP) or its subsequent extensions/follow-ons; (ii) is able to support communications using the Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) suite or its subsequent extensions/follow-ons, and/or other IP-compatible protocols; and (iii) provides, uses

or makes accessible, either publicly or privately, high level services layered on the communications and related infrastructure described herein (ibid.:18).

The internet has undergone many changes before it came into existence. Conceived in the era of time-sharing, has survived into the era of personal computers, client-server and peer-to-peer computing, and the network computer. It was designed before LANs existed. Before electronic mail and World Wide Web came into existence, the Internet was envisioned as supporting a variety of functions such as file sharing and remote login to resource sharing and collaboration. But what is most important when one talks about the internet is that it started with the creation of a very small group of dedicated researchers, and has grown to be a commercial success with billions of dollars of annual investment(Smith,2007:15).

Computer is now considered standard equipment and it is used in most language classrooms. After the introduction of computers, the Internet is now being introduced in teaching English. This is also the cause of some problems for teachers who are not much familiar with the use of computers(ibid.:16).

All in all , the Internet is a network of thousands of computers linked together so it is an accumulation of information in any field that can be used by the teachers. It can also be used to exchange information between teachers and students or other students using electronic mail, news groups or discussion groups.

2.1 The Internet as a resource of authentic materials.

The use of realia is widely considered to have great value in fostering an active teaching-learning environment in the ESL/EFL(English as a second language/ English as a foreign language) classroom. Presenting information through realia using diverse media helps to make language input as comprehensible as possible. Such an activity helps to build "*an associative bridge between the classroom and the world*" (Heaton, 1979). To define realia, one has to remember that they are not only articles on customs and traditions of a culture, but also a set of teaching aids facilitate the simulation of *experience* in the target culture. In order to meet actual communication needs, teachers have to bring students into contact with a language that is used in a target culture. This can be done by interaction with authentic materials. The use of realia, then, can enhance linguistic and cultural comprehensibility, which are both prerequisites for real language learning (Kenji and Kathleen, 2006:27).

The main difference between authentic and graded materials is that in the latter, the materials revolve around a particular structure that is presented to the student, when it is the past simple tense to be taught, texts, dialogues or records almost exclusively use this form not another one. In contrast to that, when one talks about the past in reality, native speakers may use a wider variety of tenses. Authentic materials, as they are not created for students but native speakers are the target audience, present the real communication situations and the language that is presented there resembles the one used in target culture. So that, the advantage

of using authentic materials is that the teacher presents students with actual everyday language, just as it appears in real life. There are also some disadvantages of these materials. The main one of them will be that the teacher has to spend some time on searching through the materials in order to find something that can be used in the class and bring maximum profit(ibid:30).

The idea of digitalizing realia and organizing it into a web site seems to be reasonable, useful and logical. This is due to the fact that further developments in language teaching techniques can be used in the digital age. This occurs when there is an increasing integration of computers into language instruction and phenomenal growth of the Internet. Such activity will lead to creation of so called virtual realia that can be defined as the collection of linguistic and non-linguistic authentic materials which have been compiled, scanned, and posted on one's WWW server(Adler-Kassner and Reynolds, 1996:170)

As understanding the culture of target language enhances understanding the language itself, it is believed to be one of the most essential pedagogical principles of language teaching. The internet is a valuable resource to both language teachers and learners. The internet facilitates the use of the specific language in an authentic setting. It can also be used to acquire information from language resources for a variety of purposes like searching for information connected with their interests that are published in English (smoke, 1997:18).

Finally , one can say that the Internet provides supplemental

language activities which can provide students with additional practice in specific areas of language learning. These include reading tests, comprehension questions, grammar exercises, pronunciation exercises which are possible through the available multimedia capabilities, cloze tests, and vocabulary exercises (Smith,2007:26).

2.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of Using the Internet for Educational Purposes.

Up to this point in time, the above discussion has described some of the potential benefits of the Internet and how it can be used in the second or foreign language classroom. However, such a discussion would be incomplete without addressing the disadvantages or obstacles related to the use of the Internet in the language classroom. While the Internet and its various facets offer a great deal to the language learner, it is not without its problems. The nature of the Internet itself can be a disadvantage at times. When lines are busy due to many users, it may take time to access information or browse the Net and technical glitches themselves can lead to frustration. Lack of training and familiarity on part of the teachers can make it difficult to implement the Internet in the language classroom. This requires that school administrators specify budget for training in this area. Foreign language teachers are especially anxiety prone to computers since they often have little experience with computers. For the most part, computers in schools are used for business or computer science courses. Costs related to training, as well as on-line costs of using a provider are issues that may interfere with implementing such a technology in schools, especially in schools that have

little funding. Censorship may also be a concern to language programs and instructors. The Internet offers access to all types of issues and topics, some of which are unsuitable for children, and this in itself may result in various problems (Singhal,2007:22).

2.2.1 Advantages

The contents of the Virtual Realia site are arranged by topic rather than by difficulty level. The reasoning is that teachers are often discouraged from using an attractive piece of realia because it appears to be too difficult. By not assigning a "level" to the items, teachers are more likely to select pieces which will compel their students. Also, rather than judging the apparent difficulty of the realia item itself, one should ensure that the accompanying tasks reflect the appropriate ability level for the students concerned. Traditionally, authentic materials have been reserved for intermediate to advanced levels. However, students at lower levels stand to gain at least as much by exposure to well-selected authentic texts appropriate to their needs and abilities. With this in mind, special attention has been given to items rich in context and graphics and modest to moderate in text (Smith,2007:45)

a) Teachers

Both the adoption of authentic materials in the classroom and Internet access appear to be on the rise. Thus it will be easier for international teachers to take advantage of the benefits and "cultural experience" that Virtual Realia can provide. The Internet explosion has allowed teachers (and students) to travel through cyberspace anywhere in the world. And through the

use of carefully selected virtual realia gathered during these journeys, teachers can expose students to many if not most of the printed materials they could expect to encounter during an actual stay in the target country/culture. The hypertextual nature of virtual realia removes the limitations of the printed page and breaks down (the) geographical boundaries which once served as obstacles to procuring authentic materials (ibid:51)

There are several possible reasons for using the Internet in language teaching. One rationale is found in the belief that the linguistic nature of online communication is desirable for promoting language learning. It has been found, for example, that electronic discourse tends to be more lexically and syntactically complex than oral discourse. Another possible reason for using the Internet is that it creates optimal conditions for learning to write, since it provides an authentic audience for written communication (Mark and Fawn, 2007:27-32).

b) Students

Students can use the Internet as a resource for their projects. That is, the Internet can provide access to such resources as dictionaries or encyclopedias. Students can also find the resources and various reference materials for writing papers. There are some style sheets for writing papers. There are many useful resources to help with writing, there are library web pages, where students can look for books.

2.2.2 Disadvantages

a) Teachers

Mindful of the complexities which can arise in Internet usage, teachers need to provide sufficient support to prevent students from being overwhelmed by difficulties. This kind of support can take numerous forms: creating detailed handouts that students can refer to when class is finished and the teacher's personal help is not accessible; building technology training sessions into the class schedule, not only in the beginning but on an ongoing basis; working with the computer center to set up log-on systems and other procedures which are as simple and intuitive as possible; assigning students to work in pairs or groups, both in and out of the lab, so that they can provide assistance to each other; providing details to the students about how and when they can get assistance from technology specialists or others on campus outside of class; and being available to help students at times when they are most likely to need it (Pennington, 1996:1-9).

The concept of a learner-centered curriculum predates has broader significance than the Internet enhanced classroom. However, this concept seems particularly important when considering network-based teaching.

Ultimately, network-based teaching involves a number of special complexities. It will be difficult, indeed, for a teacher to be fully aware of the impact of these complexities without regular consultation with students. This might involve anonymous surveys, class discussions, or similar means of involving students in expressing their opinions about the process of implementing technologies.

b) Students

Most English teachers, even those who consider themselves computer novices, have several relative advantages when learning to use the Internet. They are, in most cases, skilled in English, experienced at typing or keyboarding, and have some basic computer literacy (i.e., they probably have at least used a computer for word processing). ESL students, on the other hand, at least in some cases, may lack these basic prerequisites. Though we have had students who are quite experienced with computers, we have also had students who had seldom used a computer; lacked basic knowledge such as how to operate a mouse or open a folder; and lacked the vocabulary, reading, and listening skills to follow instructions for using the computer (ibid.)

Beyond these issues of learner preparation, there are a number of other complexities in introducing Internet-based activities in the ESL classroom. Activities in a single class may be dependent on scheduling the computer lab, and on students finding computers outside the class time to continue their activities. Hardware and software can malfunction and computer systems can be down. Students' schedules might not permit them to return to the computer lab at a time when computers are available to complete their assignments.

3.Six Programs Reviewed for the Purpose of Analysis

Three different kinds of communicative environments are offered by synchronous, computer-mediated audio communication (henceforth SCMAC) programs: (a) instant messaging, (b) conferences, and (c) chat groups. Some

programs offer all three, and others offer only one or two. All programs reviewed provide instant messaging, which uses both text and audio between two users. Some programs also provide video communication in their instant messaging modes. A conference, like a telephone conference call, is a temporary gathering of three or more individuals, typically fewer than 10. All programs providing conferences permit at least text communication and allow users already in a conference to invite others into the conference. Some conferences add audio and video capabilities as well, although these may be limited to one-to-one communication between two participants of the conference. Conferences disappear after the last user leaves. It is usually not possible to find an ongoing conference itself, although it may be possible to request admission to a conference if a user's acquaintance, also called a "friend," "buddy," or "pal," is in a conference (Blez,2002:60-62).

A chat room, also called a "chat group" or just "group," is typically a more permanent gathering of up to 50 individuals. Chat rooms are of two types: pre-established (by the software provider) and user-created. User-created chat rooms may be public or private, with the latter requiring non-public information (usually obtained from the chat room creator) to enter. It is always possible to share text with all members of a chat room. In addition, some programs make it possible to share audio and even video with one, several, or all members of a chat room. On some systems, the creator of the chat room has special privileges such as being able to control access to the chat room and mute or ban unruly users (Brammerts,2002:80).

Having considered the possible environments in which foreign language learners and native speakers can interact using Internet-based SCMAC, the question then arises concerning the extent to which available software provides the means to create these communicative settings. To be included in this study a program had to be (a) available without cost, (b) widely used, and (c) capable of at least synchronous audio communication between two or more Internet users using Windows or Macintosh computers. Based on these criteria, six programs are selected: AOL Instant Messenger, Yahoo Messenger, MSN Messenger, Windows Messenger, PalTalk, and iVisit. The majority of the testing of the SCMAC software was conducted using high-speed Internet connections. All reviewed programs can also be used with slower connections, such as telephone modems, but speed, quality, and reliability of audio and video tend to suffer with slower connections. Even with high-speed Internet access, Internet traffic jams can result in poorer performance than that noted below (Glasmann,2001:44).

3.1 AOL Instant Messenger

AOL Instant Messenger was the first instant messaging program to be adopted by a large number of Internet users. Two versions of this program were reviewed: Version 4.8.2790 for Windows (95, 98, 2000, NT, XP) and Version 4.3.1232 for Macintosh (OS 8, OS 9). The version for Macintosh OS X (4.5.651) promised, but had not yet provided audio at the time of testing and so was not reviewed. AOL Instant Messenger provides text chat in both

instant message (one-to-one) and conference environments. File transfer is also provided. AOL Instant Messenger currently has no video capability and while it does offer audio communication, its audio capabilities are limited (Blake,2000:136).

3.2 Yahoo Messenger for Windows

Yahoo Messenger Version 5.4 for Windows (95, 98, 2000, NT, and XP) is a very versatile program, which provides both one-to-one and multiparty text chat as well as one-to-one audio and video conferencing. A Macintosh version is also available, but it does not support audio and so was not reviewed. Yahoo Messenger can be used in three different environments: Instant Message, Conference, and Chat Room. The instant message environment is for one-to-one communication. Here, conferences are temporary gatherings of two to nine individuals, and chat rooms are permanent or semi-permanent multi-user settings with up to 50 users that have been set up either by Yahoo or by individual users. A user can have multiple environments open at the same time in different windows, but audio and video connections can only be made to one window at a time (Krashen,1985:17).

3.3 MSN Messenger and Windows Messenger

MSN Messenger for Windows 95, 98, 2000, Me, and NT 4 (Version 4.6.0082 reviewed) provides multiparty text chat, but its "audio conversation" capability is limited to one-to-one connections. MSN Messenger provides file transfer, allowing partners to share files (including photo files) without the

size constraints encountered on most email systems. There is also a version of MSN Messenger for the Macintosh, but because it is limited to text communication, the Macintosh version was not included in this review. MSN Messenger has excellent audio capability, as it is capable of high-quality, full-duplex voice communication with short latencies. Talking with another MSN Messenger user is much like talking on the telephone, the only differences being more variable audio quality and a slight delay between the time one speaks and the time one's voice is heard by the other party. As with Yahoo Messenger, users of MSN Messenger can change the name that other users see (Ortega,1997:82-85).

Windows Messenger for Windows XP (Version 4.6.0078 tested) has all the features of MSN Messenger plus a number of useful additional capabilities. Version 4 is included as part of both Home and Professional editions of the Windows XP operating system, and a free upgrade to Version 4.6 is available at messenger.msn.com (Krashen and Terrell,1983:45).

3.4 PalTalk

PalTalk (Version 5 for Windows 95, 98, NT, 2000, XP) exists in both free and paid subscriber modes (PalTalk Plus). In its free version, PalTalk offers instant messaging, conferences, and chat rooms and is capable of multiparty half-duplex audio and still-frame video with up to three other users. In its paid-subscriber mode (about \$25 annually—not tested), PalTalk adds live-motion video with up to three other users. A user can create a permanent chat room for a fee starting at \$49 a month (Gary and Sujung,

2006:18) . PalTalk's audio chat room environment is of particular interest to foreign language learners and teachers. PalTalk provides both pre-existing and user-created chat groups ("groups"). In its free version, user-created chat groups are semi-permanent in that they exist only as long as the creator or the last user remains in the chat group. The chat room is re-established the next time the creator ("administrator") enters a four-digit key that was used to create the room. The creator can make the chat room private, which requires a password, and he or she can silence or eject anyone in the room. The creator can also share the room's access code with another trusted user who then becomes a "co administrator" and who can then open and moderate the chat room. Administrators' and co administrators' IDs appear with a preceding "@" in the list of the chat room participants (Blake,2000:150-155).

3.5 iVisit

iVisit (Version 2.8b2 for Windows 95 and higher; Version 2.8b2 for Mac OS 7.5 and higher, but not for OS X) differs in many respects from the other programs reviewed. First, iVisit is unique in that virtually all of its features are available for both Windows and Macintosh platforms. In addition, iVisit uses a multiparty peer-to-peer architecture instead of relying on a central server. This means that when you enter a chat room on iVisit, your computer makes direct connections with all of the other individuals in the room. This makes it possible for iVisit to offer multiparty full-duplex audio, with half-duplex being the default option, and multiparty video, the only program reviewed here

with these capabilities (Toyoda and Harrison, 2002:82-84).

4. Advantages and Disadvantages of Teaching The English as a Foreign Language In terms of SCMAC Programs

It should be quite obvious to anyone living in a technologically developed country today that the widespread availability of personal computers and the Internet have brought about dramatic changes in the way that one communicates. The use of electronic mail is the most obvious way which one's communicative behavior has changed over the last two decades. Instant messaging systems are also gaining widespread use with the integration of the Internet into various wireless devices such as portable telephones.

However, none of these computer mediate communication media has yet had a major impact on foreign language teaching and learning. There are certainly many instructors and students who make use of foreign-language materials on the Internet; and there are numerous foreign-language courses that make use of the World Wide Web. But there remains a vast and largely untapped Internet resource for foreign language teachers and learners that has recently become available, namely, audio access to native speakers of the foreign language. Native speakers who use the Internet comprise a particularly valuable resource for foreign language learners since a major barrier to the development of foreign listening and speaking proficiency is the lack of opportunity to converse with native speakers of the target language.

1. AOL Instant Messenger

Through analyzing the present program, the researcher finds out the following advantages and disadvantages:

A: The advantages:

1. Two versions of this program were reviewed: Version 4.8.2790 for Windows (95, 98, 2000, NT, XP) and Version 4.3.1232 for Macintosh (OS 8, OS 9).

2. AOL Instant Messenger provides text chat in both instant message (one-to-one) and conference environments.

3. AOL Provides file transfer.

B. The Disadvantages:

1. AOL Instant Messenger currently has no video capability and while it does offer audio communication, its audio capabilities are limited.

2. Sound quality with AOL Instant Messenger was quite variable and often had longer latencies (more than a second) than the other programs reviewed. The user has a choice between half- ("walkie-talkie mode") and full- ("telephone mode") duplex audio, but audio works only one-to-one. As with other programs offering both half- and full-duplex audio, the choice of one mode over the other depends on user preferences and the ability of the program to maintain high-quality audio when used in the more demanding full-duplex mode.

2. Yahoo Messenger for Windows

A. The Advantages:

1. Yahoo Messenger Version 5.4 for Windows (95, 98, 2000, NT, and XP) is a very versatile program, which provides both one-to-one and multiparty text chat as well as one-to-one audio and video conferencing..

2. Yahoo Messenger can be used in three different environments: Instant Message, Conference, and Chat Room.
3. A user can have multiple environments open at the same time in different windows, but audio and video connections can only be made to one window at a time
4. Yahoo Messenger provides a large number of pre-established audio- and video-enabled chat rooms for up to 50 participants at any one time.
5. Using Yahoo Messenger, a teacher can easily set up a private chat room for students that cannot be entered by others .
6. Under the category of "Schools and Education," there are the subcategories "Study Abroad," "Bilingualism," and "Exchange Student" which offer additional possibilities for finding speakers of desired languages.

B. The Disadvantages:

1. A Macintosh version is available, but it does not support audio and so is not reviewed.
2. Video is available as a small frame that can be made two or three times larger, resulting in a larger but same-resolution image. The frame rate is found to be quite slow, about three per second, providing a very jerky video image for moving subjects.
3. Yahoo Messenger does not offer complete documentation or support.

3. MSN Messenger and Windows Messenger

A. The Advantages:

1. There is a version MSN Messenger for Windows 95, 98, 2000, Me, and NT 4 and there is also a version of MSN Messenger for the Macintosh, but because it is limited to text communication, the Macintosh version was

not included in this review.

2. MSN Messenger provides file transfer, allowing partners to share files (including photo files) without the size constraints encountered on most email systems.

3. There is a version of Windows Messenger for Windows XP (Version 4.6.0078 tested) has all the features of MSN Messenger plus a number of useful additional capabilities.

4. Windows Messenger is used with a Webcam and allows users to see each other in a small video window while talking. Its video, while limited to a small video frame and moderate frame rates, was among the

best of the programs reviewed and permits senders to monitor their own video in a corner of their correspondent's video image. nWindows Messenger also provides several features beyond text, audio and video, and file transfer. These include remote assistance, application sharing, and a whiteboard. Remote assistance allows User A to give permission to User B to see and control User A's computer, which can be particularly useful for

troubleshooting. Application sharing allows two connected users to share any application located on either computer so that, for example, the two connected users can work on the same document together. The whiteboard provides an environment for collaborative drawing and graphics creation. The addition of these collaborative capabilities, along with the text chat, audio, and video capabilities of Windows Messenger, makes it the program of choice for one-on-one SCMAC where both partners are using Windows XP.

5. MSN Messenger has excellent audio capability, as it is capable of high-

quality, full-duplex voice communication with short latencies. Talking with another MSN Messenger user is much like talking on the telephone, the only differences being more variable audio quality and a slight delay between the time one speaks and the time one's voice is heard by the other party.

6. On Windows Messenger You can find speakers of a given language by making up a common name and searching by country.

B. The Disadvantages:

1. Since audio in these programs is limited to one-to-one communication, these text chat rooms are not audio enabled.

4. PalTalk

A. The Advantages :

1. PalTalk (Version 5 for Windows 95, 98, NT, 2000, XP) exists in both free and paid subscriber modes (PalTalk Plus). In its free version, PalTalk offers instant messaging, conferences, and chat rooms. In addition, it adds live-motion video with up to three other users.

2. PalTalk's audio chat room environment is of particular interest to L2 learners and teachers. PalTalk provides both pre-existing and user-created chat groups ("groups").

3. There is no chaos for the creator can make the chat room private, which requires a password, and he or she can silence or eject anyone in the room. The creator can also share the room's access code with another trusted user who then becomes a "co-administrator" and who can then open and moderate the chat room. Administrators' and co-administrators' IDs appear with a preceding "@" in the list of the chat room participants. PalTalk also provides some degree of adult

("parental") control over children's access to its rooms and features.

4. The offensive language is not permitted.

5. Of all the programs reviewed, PalTalk provides the best environment for group audio chat. This is because of its consistently good audio quality and because it includes a "req talk" button that one can click to indicate intention to address the group. Clicking this button raises one's ID to a queue at the top of the list of participants and adds a raised hand icon. In this way an administrator can see who has requested to talk and pass the microphone in an orderly fashion from one user to another. Of all the programs reviewed, PalTalk was the only one in which audio chat was almost always used in chat rooms, with users of other programs tended to rely primarily on text chat. In addition, of all the programs reviewed, PalTalk had what appeared to be the greatest number of interesting and educational chat rooms. With other software it was often difficult to find any chat room that was not dominated by sexual, obscene, or defamatory communication. PalTalk has its share of these, too, but there are also more serious and educational chat rooms. Of particular interest are chat rooms created for practising English and other languages (listed under "Distance Learning"). Some of these were moderated discussions in the target language while others were actual language lessons offered by individual users wishing to help others learn the language.

6. It is unavailable for Macintosh users.

7. PalTalk also has three or more help rooms available at any given time. Here users can find assistance for PalTalk problems from live helpers who appear

quite knowledgeable about the program.

B. The Disadvantages :

1. It does not provide protection to minors from potential predators who may enter general rooms and cause problems before being blocked or banned by a PalTalk administrator.

5. iVisit

A. The Advantages:

1. There are version 2.8b2 for Windows 95 and higher; Version 2.8b2 for Mac OS 7.5 and higher, but not for OS X).

2. It is possible to find speakers of other languages in chat rooms and request two-way communication with them.

3. An interesting and unique feature of iVisit is its ability to record all the text, audio, and video of a communication session (after obtaining permission from all participants) for a period of up to 10 minutes. It can then be played back locally or over the Internet to connected users. This feature was not completely reliable when we tested it, but its potential is obvious for Foreign language learners and teachers.

4. iVisit is primarily used as a video-plus-text environment, and a very high percentage of iVisit users has live Webcams. The program offers 160 x 120 video resolution in a small window that can be enlarged while the resolution remains the same.

B. The Disadvantages:

1. One disadvantage associated with this procedure is that one's list of contacts, called "bookmarks" in iVisit, is stored on the local computer and is therefore not available to the user when using a different computer unless the original bookmark file is transferred to the new computer.

2. The sound quality tends to deteriorate with large groups, and the video frame rate

often slows down to less than one frame per second, particularly when someone joins the group who has a slow modem connection. That means the audio environment may become chaotic in chat rooms with many users.

3. There is no user directory available on iVisit.

4. Audio is not used much in iVisit except by a minority of users with more powerful computers and high-speed Internet connections. Audio rooms have been established in several languages (under "iVisit World"), but they are seldom and sparsely occupied.

Accordingly, it is recommended to use PalTalk and Yahoo Messenger for Windows users wanting to find and interact with pre-established audio chat groups in foreign languages . PalTalk works best with groups using audio for three reasons: (a) it allows users to request to talk, thus helping to reduce or eliminate audio chaos, (b) audio is used in just about every chat room, and (c) more serious chat rooms were found on PalTalk compared to the other programs. Yahoo Messenger also works well for this purpose for Windows users, but users must "grab" the mic instead of requesting it. Yahoo Messenger, however, offers file sharing and a user directory, both lacking in PalTalk. iVisit is less suited for group audio chat using Windows for three reasons: (a) its audio quality can deteriorate with larger groups or when someone with a slow Internet connection joins a session, (b) few groups use audio, and (c) when group audio is used, chaos usually results. Nonetheless, iVisit is the only program reviewed that Macintosh users can use in audio chat rooms.

To sum up, it is worth mentioning that PalTalk is the best one

among the programs analyzed above since it provides an environment of considerable value for foreign language learners and teachers. Individual foreign language learners can find chat rooms using their target language and then either observe and listen, participate, or attempt to connect to an individual in the chat room (perhaps after first participating in the chat room and announcing their intention to engage in tandem language learning with any interested user). Teachers can set up private chat rooms for their classes and moderate and control user access and participation. Audio quality was also generally very good, and the ability to "raise one's hand" to speak allows orderly group audio chat in contrast to the audio chaos typically found in other group SCMAC environments.

6. conclusions

Several years from now, a look back at the SCMAC programs reviewed above will undoubtedly be quite amusing. The continued evolution of computer hardware, software, and Internet speeds will soon make it possible for computer users to communicate over the Internet using reliable high-fidelity audio combined with DVD quality video. This will make the current programs appear crude and clumsy by comparison.

However, as this review has shown, it is not necessary for foreign language learners and teachers to wait any longer in order to take advantage of the ability to communicate online with native speakers of dozens of languages who are already connected to the Internet and using audio and video. The technology is already here, the software is free, and a polyglot world is already connected and waiting for the

opportunity to share its languages. There are many barriers still to be overcome. Foreign language teachers will need to change their methods and lesson plans in order to allow and encourage their students to use the Internet to interact with native speakers of the language they are learning. Students will also have to learn to take risks to find and speak with native speakers of their foreign language, and both students and teachers will have to become familiar with the software that now makes such communication possible.

It is hoped that this review will help remove this last barrier and encourage foreign language teachers and students to begin to remove the others as well. The promise of a worldwide community of language learners sharing their languages, along with the increased cultural awareness and understanding that inevitably accompany international communication, is well worth any short-term risks involved in making use of this promising new technology for language learning.

In addition to what is concluded above, it is found out that the best program for learning and teaching the English as a foreign language is PalTalk . This is due to the fact that it can present a lecture by a certain teacher to many students of different countries at the same time and the teacher can control them .This will prevent the existence of chaos at the time of producing the lecture by the teacher.

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