

Introducing Students in Japanese Universities to EFL-Friendly, Web-based Language Learning: Challenges and Rewards.

Louisa Dorji

Introduction

The history of computer-aided language learning (CALL) can be traced back to the days before the personal computer was available (Levy 1997). The pioneers developed programmes such as PLATO (Programmed Logic for Automatic Teaching Operations) on mainframe computers. In the 1970s and 80s, with the advent of the personal computer, language teachers began to develop their own software, creating programmes such as *Storyboard* in which the technology was subservient to the teaching methodologies of the time. This was a period when the computer was considered as a “teacher in a box” or, what Levy calls a “tutor” in its own right. Software developers tried to build into the programme the aims and objectives of the language teacher as well as instructions, feedback and help so that students could use the programme for autonomous learning in a self-access center or at home. However, even with these programmes it was soon recognized that there was still a need for teacher guidance if the lessons were to have any depth and in order to develop communicative competence.

Then, in the 80s and 90s the history of CALL entered its third phase with the arrival of the Internet. A host of new resources and possible methods were now available for communicative projects, in particular e-mail applications and web-based tasks. Since the nineties, as the possible

uses of the computer and the Internet for language teaching have continued to expand, the search for a theory of CALL, a methodology adapted specifically to CALL, has intensified. However, whilst the “gathering prestige” of CALL as a valid resource for language learning is now universally accepted, there is, nevertheless, a sense of disappointment amongst many educators, a feeling that “the rhetoric of CALL” has “gone ahead of the reality; promises of a revolution in language learning have not come to pass” (Jones 2001). Burston (1996) suggests that one of the reasons for this is the “lack of involvement” of language teaching professionals, essentially a lack of commitment to the whole project.

However, both the sense of disappointment and apparent teacher resistance to using CALL in EFL lessons could, in an optimistic interpretation, be seen as a natural dip in the collective ‘learning curve’ as teachers and researchers strive to develop a specific CALL methodology for the Internet era.

Whilst a unified methodology has not yet emerged, several factors are becoming apparent. For, example, it is now clearly recognized that the teacher has a significant role and responsibility in the CALL classroom. The teacher’s role cannot be abdicated to the computer (Warschauer 1995). The computer serves as a ‘tool’ for both the teacher and the learner rather than acting as ‘tutor’ in place of the teacher (Levy 1997). The technology is only useful if it serves the learner’s EFL needs and these needs are no different from what they would be in a conventional classroom. The teacher’s role as assessor of those needs also remains relevant. What changes for the teacher is the physical environment in the classroom, the need to manage the technology, the need to structure and present material in a slightly different way and the need to integrate collaborative and communicative speaking tasks into the framework of the lesson.

This article describes some of the challenges which a teacher new to CALL and to teaching EFL classes based on Internet resources might face. It approaches questions of appropriate methodology and technique from the perspective of native speakers of English teaching students in Japanese

universities. The guiding principle that needs to be consistently stressed is that English language-learning must always be the primary focus and objective of any computer-based or web-based activity and that communicative and collaborative tasks need to be integrated into every lesson. The article offers suggestions on how to create and maintain an EFL-friendly environment and gives tips on how best to manage the technology and the lesson plan in order to produce a suitably paced course.

Reasons for Teacher Resistance to CALL

The benefits of using computers and the Internet for EFL teaching are widely acknowledged. However, whilst many teachers have embraced the technology, many others feel a certain reluctance to use the computer as an integral part of their EFL teaching (Dodigevic 1998). An analogy can be made with the introduction of the language laboratory into schools back in the seventies. Very few were exploited to the maximum of their potential. It has been shown that there are many reasons for this reticence to utilize computer-based language learning opportunities, just as, in the past, language labs were under-used (Jones 2001). Unfamiliarity, which breeds a fear of the technology is a significant factor, but this is compounded by the fact that many teachers feel, understandably, that 'fussing' over equipment only gets in the way of the language learning process. In Japan, there is the added complication that the computer laboratory console and all the software are in Japanese.

Fear of the technology does not adequately explain teacher reticence. Even teachers who are excited by the technology are unsure about how to develop and manage an integrated language and computer course. This is because a sophisticated CALL methodology has not yet emerged, so that each teacher feels that what he or she does is still in the experimental stages.

Possibly the most important—and apparently simple—reason for reticence is that many teachers feel they do not have the time to devote to

the development of an EFL computer course (Burston 1996, Jones 2001). The process is certainly time-consuming. Firstly, the teachers need to familiarize themselves with the available applications and software. They need to evaluate them in terms of their applicability to EFL teaching objectives and the practicality of their introduction into the lesson's framework. Then they need to devise a scheme for teaching the new computer techniques in tandem with the English language content material. Finally, they need to spend a considerable amount of time in 'maintenance' work. In other words, during the course itself the teacher will need to communicate with students by e-mail, managing homework assignments, evaluation and other tasks, via the computer. This can become far more intensive than the traditional kind of teacher-student communication process (Warschauer 1995).

There are other reasons for a reluctance to use the computer for EFL teaching. For example, a native-speaker teacher might feel that class time can be spent more profitably in direct communicative contact with the students. Whilst task-based computer projects might provide ample opportunity for students in multilingual classes to collaborate using English as the medium of communication by necessity, that is not the case in monolingual classes, such as those in Japanese universities. The consistent use of English for all communication is even more difficult to enforce in a computer class than in the usual monolingual EFL class.

'Applicability' is an issue in many teachers' minds when it comes to the Internet. If the Internet is to be used as a source of original materials written in English, two main problems become evident. Firstly, there is a danger of information and language overload. Each website consists of a large body of English which most Japanese university students cannot be expected to wade through unassisted. It would indeed be unusual for a teacher in a conventional EFL class to present elementary level learners with texts that have not been adapted in any way to suit their level. There is a strong argument that 'exposure' to natural, un-vetted forms of English written texts is beneficial. However, it is also the case that

in the context of the EFL course, condensed as it is into a limited number of class hours, there is a perceived need to focus on particular aspects of the language, whether it be particular functions, specific grammar or selective vocabulary groups. An EFL textbook highlights 'bite-sized' pieces of the language for consumption and digestion. If the language is not made accessible in this way, there is a high risk that motivation and confidence will drop in all but the hardest of language learner. The burden, therefore, falls entirely on the teacher to make the raw material of Internet websites accessible to students without over-awing them. In order to do this, the teacher needs to develop techniques to isolate the information and the language to be studied in a similar way that would normally be done with any text intended for class use.

Secondly, and closely related to the above point, the apparently infinite size of the World Wide Web could lead to a real sense of disorientation in students. The notion of the worldwide web as an arena in a state of chaos was summed up by Graham Davies at the 1998 World CALL Conference in Melbourne: "The Web is like a library: enter the door and there are all the books—all heaped up on the floor" (Jones 2001). Sussex suggests that "the open-endedness of the Web encourages learners to construct more of their own learning goals, paths and agendas" but the point made by Jones that the "sheer wealth of material places even more responsibility on the teacher" is closer to the reality in Japanese universities since the greater majority of students are not at the levels of proficiency in language or computer skills that would be required for this. Furthermore, Japanese students are not generally aware of the notion of self-set learning goals (Sussex 1998, Jones 2001).

Students, then, at the very least, need to acquire a number of 'electronic literacy' skills in addition to and quite independent of English language skills. As well as the practical skills required for navigating on the worldwide web, they also need to acquire critical thinking: they need to know how to evaluate web addresses and sites, and to learn strategies for keeping their aims in sight and their searches on a useful course. The

question arises as to whether the English teacher should be spending time teaching these skills (Teeler and Gray 2000, Field 2002). Many teachers remain in doubt.

Reasons For Using CALL and the Value of the Internet for EFL

Many software programmes have been developed for language teaching, some which are intended for use in self-access centers, as a substitute for the teacher and others that allow teachers to use them in a more flexible manner as an integral part of a lesson (Warschauer and Healey 1998). Multimedia and CALL classes are now regularly offered in most universities in Japan, signaling a recognition of the value of computers to 'aid' language learning.

What has given CALL new impetus is the expansion of the Internet to the point where it has become a significant part of everyday life. Indeed, it is the Internet which has caused teachers to redefine the way they use the computer for language learning (Eastment 1996). The technical capacities of the Internet have also expanded teachers' options considerably. Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) and the availability of target-language textual resources and downloadable software programmes allow for a wealth of new teaching ideas and techniques to emerge. Web-Assisted Language Learning (WALL) has become the basis for many of the CALL courses on offer in universities in Japan today. Since this is the case, this article focuses on the Internet as a pedagogical tool and seeks to ascertain which methods of Internet-based teaching are in common use.

What value is there in using the Internet as a tool and as a materials resource in EFL courses? In general terms, putting specific issues of language aside, it is accepted that access to the Internet increases global awareness, a positive end in itself, and prepares students for their future careers (Warschauer and Healey). Furthermore, several studies have

shown that motivation appears to increase in students when using the Internet in EFL classes (Jarrell). In fact, students have been shown to be generally enthusiastic about the idea of using computers for language learning even if they are not sure, at the outset, of *how* it will improve their English (Jones, 2001 and Warschauer and Healey 1998). Certainly, in terms of subject-matter, there is something of interest to everyone and students do experience a sense of freedom to explore. In addition, the information available is up-to-the minute and the visuals and multimedia options provide further appeal. All these factors are certainly worth exploiting for EFL teaching purposes.

From a language perspective, the Internet provides instant and easy exposure to the English language to anyone, anywhere who has access to a computer. Moreover, its very existence has reinforced the status of English as the international *lingua franca*, since a high percentage of the information on the Internet is written in English. The process of globalization and the relevance of the English language as a *lingua franca* are mutually reinforced by the use of the Internet as the means of communication in the modern world. Students studying English on the Internet, therefore, are learning a useful combination of skills for the future.

From a pedagogical point of view, the easy availability of resources found on the worldwide web presents infinite possibilities for task-based projects. Combine this with the capabilities offered by word-processing, picture editing and other applications, such as PowerPoint or FrontPage and students are offered a world of possibilities for creative projects that encourage them to use English in a meaningful way. The Internet and the computer become tools for learner-centered, collaborative language learning.

The Internet is not only a source of English teaching material: it is the major communication tool of the Twenty-first Century. As such, it follows that EFL teachers might be expected to be keen to exploit this new means of communicating. Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) is

an exciting area that is opening up new possibilities in the language classroom. Asynchronous E-mail and Bulletin Boards, synchronous Messenger and Chat and the virtual worlds of Moos offer exciting possibilities for language practice. Audio-visual capacities allow students to listen to radio programmes on-line, watch movie clips or even to hold a video conference with students on the other side of the world.

However, the question is, how to exploit the possibilities of the Internet effectively from a pedagogical point of view, without losing sight of EFL teaching objectives and goals and remaining realistic about the constraints of timing, planning and good classroom management. It is important to evaluate carefully how the technology can be used to the best advantage in the language class and whether the different types of programmes and communication methods can be usefully integrated into the lesson.

The Role and Responsibility of the Teacher

It is clear, then that in CALL and WALL classes, the usual burden of responsibility rests with the teacher. As the quote referring to the “rhetoric” versus the “reality” of teaching with computers suggests, the computer does not do the magical job of educating students all by itself. The importance of having a good teacher has not diminished (Teeler and Gray 2000). The teacher will undoubtedly need to spend a much longer time than usual searching for, assessing and adapting material. Creating an effective lesson plan requires detailed, step-by-step thinking through of the order in which the technology will be used. Then, in the classroom, the teacher has to carefully direct and guide students both as a group and individually. Using CALL to the best advantage is no easy task. And even when everything has gone smoothly, teachers may often find themselves asking, “But was it relevant to my language teaching objectives”?

Matching the Medium to the Objectives of EFL Teaching in Japanese Universities.

When it comes to assessing the applicability of Internet resources for use in EFL classes, the English teacher's approach needs to be no different from usual—the criteria for exploiting material and planning a useful language learning experience are exactly the same as for any EFL lesson. The teacher's role is to assess materials, set objectives and design and structure the lesson. As will be shown below, a slightly new approach is required when it comes to structuring the material and devising means to present it. In addition, the teacher also needs to decide on the medium to be used—e-mail, Chat, websites etc.—and consider ways to exploit that medium effectively.

The possibilities that the new technology offers inspire ideas for new types of language learning experiences that a teacher could not have considered feasible before. And the information available on websites, in written and interactive forms, permits new types of research. The Internet is an inexhaustible source of teaching 'realia'. E-mail, Chat and multimedia options make for exciting lessons. By concentrating on task-based learning, it is easy to make a CALL lesson learner-focused and collaborative in nature. However, a teacher always needs to assess the value of 'fancy' techniques in terms of the language learning opportunities they provide and the time they may take simply to set up. First and foremost, the topics and the methods need to suit the students' needs and capabilities.

The students.

It is at this point that we need to consider the classroom situation in which we find ourselves in Japanese universities. What constitutes suitable materials, methodology and technological tools, in the average university classroom, taught by a native speaker who is, let us assume, relatively new to computers? A number of factors need to be taken into consideration.

Firstly, what might teachers expect from their students?

Students entering the first year of university in Japan are still relatively new to computers, having had only a minimum of basic computer classes at school and probably not owning a computer themselves. Students are seldom required to produce typed homework assignments and their knowledge of e-mail is mostly restricted to the mobile phone version. Furthermore, it is to be expected that students' level of English is somewhere between beginner and pre-intermediate. Therefore, it is almost certain that most teachers of CALL and Internet English will need to come to terms with the notion of teaching two subjects simultaneously and plan accordingly. One advantage of this is that the teacher new to the CALL environment can progress gradually, experimenting with the material and techniques of this new medium of communication.

The 'double course' dilemma: how it affects the teacher's role

If we assume that the majority of computer-based EFL lessons in Japan are, in effect, two courses in one, this is an issue which affects the role of the teacher, the method of instruction, the timing of the lesson and the order of activities. Teachers must not forget how much the students are trying to absorb at one time. Attention has been drawn to the fact that "simultaneous and, in some cases competing, demands are being made upon students' cognitive skills and repertoire of learning strategies" (Field 2002). Since the majority of the students are new to computers and have a relatively low level of English ability, they will be struggling to keep up (Pellowe 1999). Teachers need to be aware of the demands they are making and adjust the pace of the lesson accordingly.

Some analysts go as far as to suggest that students should not join a CALL class until they have reached a certain level in basic computer classes so that they are less likely to be distracted by the technical aspects (Teeler 2000). However, while students' limited computer skills are a factor for teachers to consider today, this will surely become irrelevant within a few years, as students gain more computer skills in high schools.

The role of the teacher in the CALL classroom is different from that of a teacher in an oral communication class: as well as being a facilitator in the language learning process, the teacher also becomes an instructor of computer procedures. Much more of the lesson time is taken up with procedure and instructions than would be the case in the usual communicative language classroom. The tool of instruction—the computer—becomes the focus of the instruction and takes up a good proportion of lesson time. As a result, teachers find that they are doing much more of the talking than they would usually do in an EFL class, where the objective is to provide more time for the students to talk. There is then a temptation to give instructions in Japanese in order to save time. This point will be discussed below but these issues need careful consideration by native-speaker teachers if they are keen to ensure that English remains the medium of instruction and if they want to ensure that students' language practice time is not reduced.

Relevant Internet-based Activities

There are two main ways in which to use the Internet in the EFL classroom. Firstly, the Internet can be used as a tool in computer-mediated communication (CMC) activities. The communication can be either synchronous or asynchronous. Secondly, the Internet can be used as a materials resource for students as they prepare their own task-based projects. These projects can include traditional textual information as well as making use of the multimedia options such as radio broadcasts or film trailers.

1. Computer-mediated communication

In the case of communicative projects, there are exciting possibilities. Although it often proves very difficult to set up a video-link with fellow students in another part of the world, it is, in theory possible (Teeler and Gray 2000). Many 'MOO virtual environments' have been created

specifically for language learners. Learners take on a particular identity and wander around virtual rooms, chatting with the people they meet there. A favourite site is the Schmooze university site¹⁾. Using a MOO is not something that can be 'dipped into' since students will need to spend a considerable amount of time on it in order to perceive any benefits. A few classes could be spent introducing it to the students as a possible out-of-class activity²⁾.

Less ambitious projects include Chat. However, in the experience of teachers to date, there are many obstacles and disadvantages to using Chat as a teaching tool. Some of the reasons can be briefly listed here. Chat is text-based and synchronous so it might be considered useful—it resembles a normal conversation but because it is written it gives students who are not confident in speaking the chance to communicate their ideas in a genuine conversation. However, being synchronous and occurring on-line with a number of participants from all over the world has serious disadvantages. A student with a basic level of English simply cannot keep up. Moreover, the teacher cannot have any significant input and cannot control the language or the content of the conversation.

A survey of Chat sites that are intended specifically for learners of English quickly shows that even they are often not suitable for students in terms of the topics discussed and the language used. In general, introducing students to Chat sites involves taking responsibility for what and who they come into contact with. Since the nature of Chat sites prevents any control over who your students 'meet', many teachers prefer to avoid them.

There are alternatives to open on-line Chat sites which involve closed systems in which only the class members can participate. One such system, which is popular among teachers in Japan is the 'LECs Chat System' developed by Taoka Harada and Tomohiro Yasuda³⁾. Using this

1) <http://schmooze.hunter.cuny.edu:8888/>.

2) See *Dave Sperling's Internet Guide* (1998). New Jersey. Prentice Hall Regents.

3) Website:<http://home.kanto-gakuin.ac.jp/~takao/lecs/>.

closed system of Chat with students, teachers are able to control and direct the topics for discussion and produce feedback on the language used as well as the content of the discussions. Studies have shown increased student motivation and increased language output when students in Japanese, monolingual classes use LECs. The amount of ‘conversation’—albeit written—does seem to increase in comparison to face-to-face attempts at conversation in English (Freiermuth and Jarrell 2003). One of the benefits of using this kind of system over an online ‘instant messenger’ programme is that some of the delays and hitches that could occur when students are linked to the worldwide web are avoided.

Asynchronous communication by means of e-mail has many uses in EFL classes and is relatively easy to arrange and administer. It involves signing students up with an all-English free E-mail account and then integrating its regular use into the class plan. Students can be given small tasks which require them to communicate with partners by e-mail in order to complete their homework. This necessitates careful monitoring and a willingness on the part of the teacher to maintain e-mail contact with all the class members on a regular basis. It does not require the teacher to answer each e-mail individually every week, but some greeting, E-card or message should be sent every week in order to accustom the students to checking their e-mail accounts regularly. Using E-mail during the course of a single lesson is not recommended since there are many causes of delay that could disrupt the lesson’s timing: for example, delivery hitches and students taking an excessive amount of time to compose their reply.

2. The Internet as a materials resource for task-based learning

Using the computer to teach English fits in well with the objectives of ‘task-based’ and ‘learner-centered’ collaborative classes which have been popular concepts in theories of communicative language teaching for some time now (Willis 1996 and Keobke 1998). Relevant tasks are “activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome” (Willis). The task is set up as

the focus of the students' attention and the Internet is the medium through which they find the information necessary to complete the task. For example, students might be asked to decide together where in the world they would like to spend a weekend and then produce an itinerary for that weekend's activities using the materials discovered during their websearch. The theory is that in order to complete the task students need to collaborate and communicate in English. The fundamental assumption of this theory is rather undermined in monolingual Japanese university classes, since students will be tempted to communicate in Japanese, rather than the target language, English. However, the need to navigate around web sites written in English, select the relevant information and to work with a partner rewriting the information in their own words, are demanding yet rewarding tasks. The emphasis in a computer-based EFL class shifts towards learner-centered, collaborative projects that give students a strong sense of achievement.

A text-based collaborative project might start with setting a short task centred on one particular web-site selected by the teacher. The students can be asked to search for specific answers to specific questions. This involves a web-search, exercising reading skills—in particular, skimming—and writing answers on paper⁴⁾. Alternatively, students could be asked to complete an on-line vocabulary gap-filling exercise created by the teacher using a site such as Hot Potatoes⁵⁾. Once the theme has been established and important vocabulary highlighted, the project can then be extended to involve more extensive searches for information. The teacher can define the limits of these searches by suggesting web-sites or keywords or the students can be given freedom to define their own criteria.

The search task can, in effect be carefully limited by setting a precise task: students could be asked to produce their own report, proposal, magazine, presentation or web-page on a specific topic. Let us take as our

4) *Dave Sperling's Internet Activity Workbook* (1999). Prentice Hall Regents is full of ideas for short searches based on various topics.

5) <http://web.uvic.ca/hrd/halfbaked/>.

example the task mentioned above, in which a teacher asks students to work in pairs and plan a weekend itinerary for themselves in the city of their choice. Such a project requires discussion, a web-search and the creation of a Word document using various capabilities such as cut and paste, picture insertion, scanning, wrapping and arranging text, Word Art and more. The 'Book2Web' series of texts, designed for English-speaking high school students integrates the use of a textbook with web-based projects and suggests websearch projects for each topic⁶⁾.

The multimedia options provided by the Internet can be exploited in similar ways. Students can listen to news reports or interviews and complete tasks set by the teacher at their own pace. Film trailers can be used in a number of ways. Teeler and Gray (2000) offer some ideas.

The most important thing for the EFL teacher to remember is that the student should not be expected to struggle with the complexities of the computer. The teacher should always stick to simple techniques. For example, any report can look good simply by writing inside a table. The steps for creating a table are very simple to teach. By the end of the course presentations could be prepared using presentation software such as Powerpoint and students could be shown how to use simple web-page wizards. These wizards do away with the need to learn difficult html language and are very user-friendly. It is important to keep in mind that the course is not primarily for teaching computer skills but for using what the computer has to offer to improve English skills. A teacher must always consider and balance the time it takes to learn how to use the tool against the value of the finished English produced.

Managing the Internet English Class

Finding a balance between speaking and writing

Whilst the Internet is the revolutionary communicative tool of our era,

6) Book2Web series (The Wright Group). See www.book2web.com.

much of the communication is in written, rather than spoken form. Unless using the Internet phone or video and voice links, 'conversation' is more commonly in the written form. Whilst 'Chat' resembles a conversation in that it is synchronous, it is still in the written form. E-mail is both asynchronous and written, just like a traditional letter. Bulletin Boards allow people to interact and respond to other people's opinions but they too are in a written form. Moreover, all of the information on Internet websites is textual. Any Internet search activity involves students in sifting through a large quantity of written material.

Native-speaker EFL teachers may feel that their particular contribution should be to provide exposure to the spoken language and a chance for students to practice their speaking skills. Yet in computer classrooms, students actually speak less English. Firstly, students sitting in front of 'their' computer are more resistant to moving around in order to get into pairs or groups and they find it easy to avoid speaking in English during all the stages of the task since it is more difficult for the teacher to supervise them. Secondly, as mentioned above, many of the text-based synchronous possibilities that are available, such as Chat or Messenger, are not suitable for in-class use with students who have a low level of English.

Yet it is still possible to integrate spoken pairwork activities into the lesson if they are controlled and monitored in manageable 'blocks' of time. Tasks should be specific and used as a means to introduce the theme or vocabulary of the lesson. Before moving to a web-based task, students should be put into pairs or groups away from the computer and given small collaborative tasks to complete. These can be as simple as interviewing their partner about their favourite work of art or more complicated in nature, such as planning their itinerary for the above-mentioned sightseeing weekend.

If a web-based search activity then follows as the central part of the lesson, students will be moving into the realm of written English and will find this challenging in a different way. It is unrealistic to expect them to continue to collaborate on the project speaking only English, given

their level and the fact that they are in a monolingual class. But their finished project will be in English and they will have needed to work hard on the language to complete it. If the project does not involve any web-search activity, and sets a creative task such as making a class newspaper or creating a web-page or leaflet that gives say, restaurant reviews or recommendations, then the students would be involved in making choices together about the type of language and the structure of the sentences they use. There is no point in trying to force the use of spoken English further than this. The constraints of CALL and monolingual classes need to be accepted.

Issues of language use for instruction

It is possible to argue that, in a CALL class, teachers should not worry about providing the practical instructions in Japanese since they are simply a means to an end. The objective of the lesson is to access the worldwide web, e-mail or to use other applications such as Word and PowerPoint as a means to advance language learning. This is a compelling argument, particularly when the language level—especially the listening skills—of the students is rather low. However, the issue is not that simple. Many native-speaker English teachers would not feel confident giving instructions in Japanese, depending on their Japanese language ability, and, particularly, because of the specialist vocabulary required. Moreover, an English class with a native speaker is an opportunity lost if the native speaker speaks in Japanese.

Indeed, there are very positive reasons for using English for all classroom instructions—reasons which relate to the principles of language “immersion” and content-based teaching. Teaching computer use in English is an ideal content-based teaching situation. The students need to learn how to use the computer in order to proceed to the task. They need to listen and understand the teacher’s instructions. This provides a real motivation for understanding. If the teacher speaks only English the experience approaches an ‘immersion’ situation in which the student has no

choice but to negotiate meaning. If we approach the problem from this perspective then it quickly becomes clear that the solution lies in taking time to plan carefully choreographed sets of instructions in English. These spoken instructions should be reinforced by written handouts which give the same instructions step by step. The teacher and student can refer to the printed version in class and students can keep the instructions for future use. Since much computer language is, in any case, English, this is another reason for the students to make the connection with their katakana version on the Japanese menu bar and the alphabet version in the instructions.

Problems regarding the students' approach to the written word

There are many benefits to being exposed to the mass of information available in English on the Internet but there are also many problems. The major problem is information overload. This is not confined to students of EFL on the Internet. Knowing how to use the Internet efficiently in order to extract the information you need is a new skill that all Internet users are beginning to learn. The issue of 'electronic literacy' is important and students need to be assisted in order to keep their research on track. The teacher should be teaching tips on how to make the most efficient search as an integral part of the lesson. Demonstrations on a typical search made by the teacher and the establishment of criteria for evaluating the usefulness of particular sites even before reading them, are useful ways to bring to students' attention the fact that they will need to make important choices at all stages of the search.

'Cut and paste plagiarism' is another issue that needs to be dealt with in the Internet English class. In a general sense, students in Japanese universities are barely aware of the concept of plagiarism and its possible legal consequences. The issue is becoming more topical in the Internet age, when students have been found to be producing essays that are clearly plagiarised. However, we have not yet reached a point where students themselves feel that they are doing anything wrong.

Legalities aside, it is important to make students understand that by copying the English word-for-word, they are not getting any real learning benefit from the exercise: they are not thinking about what they want to say and the words they need to say it. In addition, in many cases, they will not have actually understood—or made the effort to understand—what they have written down. There is also another factor at play: the technique that Japanese students regularly employ in summarizing a piece of writing is to pick out the main sentences of the article and string them together. The notion that they can and should use other words to capture the meaning of the piece in as brief a way as possible is not familiar to them. Students need to be made aware of what is expected of them and taken, step by step, through the process of reading for understanding and then using their own words to explain their understanding. They must be shown that although they can and, indeed should, recycle the vocabulary, they should not be copying structures wholesale.

Managing the Physical Conditions in the Computer Classroom

Managing the classroom environment

The layout of many of the computer classrooms in Japanese universities does not promote teacher-student interactions other than by the traditional lecture style. Computers are most often arranged in rows, with little space for the teacher to move around them. Students sitting behind their computers are distanced physically from the teacher and getting them to move around to work with new partners is difficult.

The recommended CALL classroom layout, designed to encourage teacher-student and student-student interaction would consist of round or hexagonal tables with computers facing outwards so that students are seated in natural groups with plenty of space for moving to form pairs or groups and for the teacher to circulate or teach from the center of the room⁷⁾.

7) See Teeler and Gray 2000, p.55 for an illustration.

This is a rarity in Japanese universities. However, if the balance is to be kept between speaking and reading or writing English, it is necessary to adapt the classroom layout to this need.

Rather than simply accept the situation, teachers need to overcome the difficulty by establishing a routine from the very first lesson whereby students are put into small groups for speaking activities that do not involve the use of the computer. Students need to be made aware from the beginning that they will be expected to swap partners from time to time and that for speaking activities and collaborative work, they will need to group themselves around one table or corner of a table, awkward as this may be. A less satisfactory but acceptable alternative is to let the same pairs work together at neighbouring computers.

Managing the technology

Managing the teacher's console would be daunting for any teacher new to CALL, but a native-speaker teacher has extra problems. Often a Teaching Assistant or member of staff is available to help. Whether or not help is available, teachers need to familiarize themselves with the essentials from the beginning and build up familiarity slowly by experimenting in small ways that do not jeopardize the timing of the lesson. The absolute essentials consist of knowing how to switch on the central monitors placed on the students' desks, between the individual computers, which allow you to display and to switch between an image of your desktop or an individual student's desktop, a video and an OHP document (displayed on the screen via the video monitor).

Once the system is up and running, students should immediately be guided to the home page of an English-language search site such as Yahoo.com, so that the teacher is on home ground and students are immersed in the English-language environment. The Japanese-language menu bars will remain because it is rare to find a computer classroom with an English operating system installed. The same is true of the basic software, such as Microsoft Word. However, the teacher can turn this disability into

an advantage by using the translation of the menu bar terms into English as a mutual learning process. The students teach the teacher who builds up a glossary of terms in English and Japanese over the course of the semester. The teacher uses only the English terms and draws attention to the fact that many of the Japanese terms are nothing more than a katakana version of the English term.

Because of the difficulty of communicating with the computer laboratory administrators, and convincing them of the need to install English operating systems and software, native-speaker teachers can use the Internet as an intermediary platform from which they and their students can access directly programmes which are written entirely in English.

Managing the lesson plan

Since the teacher of CALL is, in effect, teaching two courses in one, the lesson plan needs to be structured somewhat differently from a conventional language lesson. When teaching the 'how to' of using the computer, the teacher becomes an instructor. It is advisable to apply a lockstep approach to this part of the lesson and to carefully choreograph the order of the steps. The clearest, simplest language possible for communicating the instructions needs to be planned in advance. Words should be reinforced by a demonstration of the steps on the desktop, which is followed by the students on their central monitors. In addition to this, it is important to give students printed handouts of the instructions. In this way, if they miss something they can go to the hand-out for clarification and catch up with the rest of the class. They can also refer to the hand-out when they have to perform the same task on a later occasion. One other advantage of the hand-outs is that the specialist, computer-related vocabulary is there to be recycled in later classes and stored for future reference.

There is no need to show students every detail of the software they are using or bother with demonstrating alternative ways to achieve the same results. The teacher will notice how students learn about the capacities of

the software *exponentially* through use, practice and by comparing different tricks with friends. However, it is better to take nothing for granted and always give a basic set of instructions. Where students already know how to perform the step, the instructions then become an exercise in understanding and following the English.

Since the lockstep method of instruction means that everyone is progressing at the same pace, there is always the possibility that if a query or a problem arises then everyone has to wait until it is sorted out. Therefore, the lockstep method should be used sparingly.

Most EFL tasks using computers and the Internet need considerably longer periods of time for individual and collaborative work than would be the case in a traditional EFL speaking class. In a traditional class, the teacher might spend a brief period demonstrating and setting up the task and then allow a short period of, say six to ten minutes for students to complete that specific task (for example, matching pairs of words or interviewing their partner about a particular topic) before being called to attention again by the teacher who asks for feedback or moves them on to the next demonstration and task. The teacher controls the pace of the lesson closely.

In the EFL computer class, students generally need much more time to complete a task: there will be a speaking element and either a period employing the CMC technology or an Internet search element (which involves the digestion of a large body of written English). In addition, students may need to utilize particular software, depending on the task. In other words, the nature of the tasks that can be set are always learner-centered. As such, the student takes a greater control of the timing. Each student needs to work at his or her own pace in order to complete the task to his or her satisfaction. For example, if the students have been asked to find some information on a specific topic and make an attractive page that introduces their classmates to that topic, this is a fully-fledged project which could take several class periods to complete.

In order to provide the necessary time for students to work at their

own pace, the lesson plan will look rather different from a usual EFL lesson plan. The explanation and demonstration of the task and the means to complete it should, where possible be confined to the beginning of the lesson. It should always be made clear that students can refer to the hand-out if they forget what to do next. As an additional reinforcement, it is useful to write the stages of the lesson on the board at the beginning of each lesson so that students have a clear idea of the aims and objectives of the class.

Conclusion

There are many reasons why an EFL teacher, facing the prospect of teaching a CALL or Internet English class for the first time, would feel apprehensive. Some of the perceived and real difficulties have been dealt with above. For example: the complexities of the equipment, language problems and a sense that the initial promise of Web-based teaching is not realistically achievable in class. There is still a strong sense that a workable methodology has not yet emerged to help teachers adequately exploit (and, perhaps more importantly, manage) the internet. The most important issue for an EFL teacher is how to adapt Internet material and employ the technology in order to achieve the essential objectives of EFL teaching. These objectives, boil down to providing suitable language input and practical opportunities for using the language learned (output).

It has been shown that it is possible to devise an Internet course that maintains English language learning as the focus, even if the teacher is also spending a significant amount of time instructing on computer usage. The instructions themselves, if conducted in English, become a valid and very real language learning experience. It is, perhaps necessary that teachers accept that if students are studying a Web-based English course, the focus does naturally shift away from spoken English and depends more heavily on the written text. However, there is no doubt that the students will be developing their listening capacities by following the teacher's

instructions. And carefully chosen tasks, based on specific web-sites or well-defined topic-areas, will help students to develop analytical and creative skills—working with English texts. All this in addition to developing essential ‘electronic literacy’.

This article has shown the importance of the lesson plan and techniques for managing the timing, the technology and the physical conditions in the classroom. By focusing on some examples of CMC activities and on ways of using the information on websites as resource materials for task-based learning, the article attempts to illustrate the potential for developing an EFL-friendly, collaborative learning environment in the computer laboratory.

References

- Burston, J. (1996). ‘CALL at the crossroads: myths, realities, promises and challenges’. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 19/2. quoted in Jones (2001).
- Campbell, C. and Kryszewska, H. (1998). *Learner-based teaching*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.
- Dodigevic, M. (1997). ‘Computer-assisted language learning: is it here to stay?’ *EA Journal*, 16/1. Oxford. Oxford University Press.
- Eastment, (1996). *The Internet and ELT: the Impact of the Internet on English Language Teaching*. London. British Council English 2000 Publications.
- Field, M. H. (2002). ‘Towards a CALL Pedagogy: Student Use and Understanding.’ in Lewis, P. (ed.). *The Changing Face of CALL: A Japanese Perspective*. The Netherlands. Swets & Zeitlinger.
- Freiermuth, M. R. and Jarell, D. (2003). ‘Assessing Internet Chat as a language learning tool’. Presentation given at JALTCALL 2003, Kinjo Gakuen Nagoya, Japan.
- Jarrell, D. S. (2002). ‘Network-based language teaching in the Japanese Context’ in Lewis, P. (ed.). *The Changing Face of CALL: A Japanese Perspective*. The Netherlands. Swets & Zeitlinger.
- Jones, J. F. (2001). ‘CALL and the responsibilities of teachers and administrators’. *ELT Journal*, Vol. 55/4. Oxford. Oxford University Press.
- Keobke, K. (1998) ‘Computers and collaboration: adapting CALL materials to different learning styles.’ in J. Reid (ed.), *Understading Learning Styles in the Second Language Classroom*. New Jersey. Prentice Hall Regents.
- Levy, M. (1997). *Computer-Assisted Language Learning: Context and Conceptualization*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.
- Lewis, P. (ed.). (2002). *The Changing Face of CALL: A Japanese Perspective*. The Netherlands. Swets & Zeitlinger.

- Pellowe, (1999). 'Designing web pages to introduce EFL students to the Internet.' In P.N.D.Lewis (ed.), *Calling Asia, The proceedings of the 4th annual JALT CALL SIG conference, Kyoto, Japan, May 1999* (pp.203-206). Nagoya: Chubu Nihon Kyouiku Bunkabai.
- Sussex, R. (1998). 'The social dimension of CALL'. *ON-CALL* 12/1. quoted in Jones (2001).
- Teeler, D. and Gray, P. (2000). *How to Use the Internet in ELT*. Harlow. Longman.
- Warschauer, M. (1995). *E-mail for English Teaching*. Alexandria. TESOL.
- Warschauer, M. and Healey, D. (1998). 'Computers and language learning: an overview'. *Language Teaching* April 1998. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.
- Warschauer, M. and Kern, R. (eds.) (2000). *Network-Based Language Teaching: Concepts and Practice*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.
- Willis, J. (1996). *A Framework for Task-Based Learning*. Harlow. Longman.