<u>About your department</u>

Have changes been made to the language courses in your department in response to the new year 3 examination?

YES/NO

If yes: Who has initiated these changes?

What have they been?

<u>About your practice as a lecturer</u>

Have you made changes to the content of the courses you teach in response to the new year 3 examination?

YES/NO

If yes, what changes have you made?

Have you made changes to the style (in terms of delivery or organisation) in which you deliver your courses since the implementation of the new year 3 examination?

YES/NO

If yes, what changes have you made?

<u>About the old and new examinations</u>

Have you noticed any changes in students' attitudes towards examinations as a result of the new year 3 examination?

YES/NO

If yes, what are these changes?

Have you noticed any changes in students' attitudes towards their language courses as a result of the new year 3 examination?

If yes, what are these changes?

<u>About the future</u>

Do you feel that the examination preparation process can carry on in the way it has developed during the PRINCE project?

YES/NO

Please provide some more details about your opinions on this matter.

In your opinion are there any other areas of examination reform which still need to be dealt with?

Creating Effective Web Pages for the Learners of English as a Second Language

Vehbi Türel

Abstract: *This paper discusses some important issues concerning the creation of web pages. Before focusing on the core of this article, firstly a definition of the Internet will be given. Secondly, what the Internet can offer the language learners will be accounted for. Later the vital points that need to be considered when we create web materials (and add web links) will be indicated. Finally, sample web materials for a specific group of the language learners will be illustrated, and the objectives in creating and designing the materials in this particular way will be explained*

The definition of the term:

Collins Cobuild English Dictionary (CCED) defines the Internet as '... the world of wide networks of computer links which allows computer users to connect with computers all over the world, and which carries electronic mail.'

Nowadays there are, as Moore (1995:2-10) also points out, many educational and commercial organisations, and individuals who use computers. Some of these organisations and individuals have their own networks. These networks are connected together by telecommunication links, and as a result of this all these networks become one network and this is called 'the Internet'.

What the Internet can offer to language learners:

Although the Internet can offer a variety of sources, here we are only going to look at the aspects that are pertinent to language learning. In other words, the sources that can help language learners in terms of acquiring English as a second language, and help them to be aware of what is going on in their 'field' of interest will be explained. The Internet can provide the language learners with the following:

1- It offers a range of language learning materials: Today many periodicals such as daily newspapers – The Guardian, The Times, The New York Times; weekly and monthly journals and magazines – The Economist, Times, Time Magazine; and language learning materials made by individuals(1*) as well as by organisations can be accessed. Learners can read such materials as often as they want, and at their own pace. As well as reading these periodicals they can save them on floppy disks, or print them out and can read them at other times if they wish. In particular, periodicals can be a great help because, first of all, they are authentic, and therefore provide the learners with examples of language used in the real world. Not only does this prepare the learners for the real world (Nunan 1989:54, Porters & Roberts 1981:37-47), but it also helps the learners to know how native speakers in the 'target world' use the target language. Furthermore, the authenticity of these periodicals can enable the learners to be aware of the language units such as words, phrases, adjectives, adverbs and even sentences that are commonly used. This is useful because English language is very rich in terms of vocabulary. For example, the word 'understand' has synonyms such as 'comprehend' 'grasp', 'conceive' and apprehend'. This means that it is very often very difficult for learners to decide which language items should be given priority.

Secondly, as they are periodicals their contents are 'current, which offers the learners the up-to-date use of English and topics. This aspect, inevitably, can make a big difference in terms of understanding and enjoyment. Since students often have declarative information (prior information) about such topics through reading about similar news or events in their first language (L1) daily newspapers and through their national television channels, they can better understand such periodicals. This eventually might result in acquisition.

Language learning materials can also be accessed and benefited from by learners. Some of these materials such as grammar books or dictionaries may not be as effective as they could be at present, but

this, by no means, suggests that there will be no better ones in the future. As a result of new developments there will definitely be more pedagogically effective learning materials. Maybe one day the focus will be on the 'educational networks' rather than CD-ROMS because the former can be accessed by many users at the same time, which might be more economical; while the latter need to be delivered to every single institutions as well as to individuals who want to use. Moreover, as the medium of the Internet is English, words such as search, find, go back, forward, edit, save, file and so forth, can also be easily acquired by language learners as they very often encounter them when they make use of the Internet.

2- It offers vocational sources: Inevitably people learn English not for the sake of learning a foreign language, conversely they mostly learn it to get a better job or career. In terms of language learners, for example, those who learn English to be language teachers can make use of the sources such as: The Internet TESOL Journal, British Journal of Educational Technology -; the web pages of language learning and teachers' associations – IATEFL, NATESOL -; information sources – CD ROM References, Britannica, WWW Virtual Library, and Writing Sources. If we need to give another example, the other types of learners such as engineers, medical doctors can use relevant vocational Internet sources as well. From that point of view the above mentioned sources can help them to be aware of new developments in the field of their study.

3- It offers electronic mail facilities: Language learners can benefit from the Internet through electronic mail facilities, and subscribing to discussion groups. A great range of discussion groups are available and can be accesses easily (see, for example, Amiri 1995:22-23). This can contribute to language development, particularly their writing skills as John & Cash (1995:47-51) indicate, and help them to improve their knowledge through exchange of ideas.

d- It helps learners to be aware of the facilities available in the world of the target language: Many language learners the world over such as high school graduates, engineers, doctors, teachers of English and so

on learn English to be able to maintain their undergraduate and postgraduate studies in one of the countries in which the medium of instruction is English. Since today more or less all universities have web pages, those interested can access the relevant pages, and be aware of the available universities, their facilities, their correspondence addresses, and can even apply through the Internet which is time-gaining, easier and also costs effective.

So far we have tried to indicate the possible advantages of the Internet that might be relevant to language learners and language learning. Now we can turn to the essence of this article.

Important points relevant to creating web pages (materials) that need to be considered

• First of all, we should determine why the target learners are learning English as a foreign language. Are they learning English for exam purposes? Or are they learning English to enter English medium institutions of higher education (for first degrees or post-graduate studies) around the world? Or are they learning English to be English teachers? Are we supposed to prepare the same kinds of materials for all the above mentioned learners or should they be designed in different ways? Of course, we are not supposed to create the same materials, and in the same way for different learners who learn a language for different purposes. The type of materials, their contents can, and need to, be different. In short, the learning objectives of the target students should, and must, be known.

• The level of the learners and their age are other vital points need to be considered. Can a BBC news program, for instance, be used with a group of 10-15 years-old elementary learners as effectively as with a group of 20-25 years-old advanced learners? Such material, of course, cannot benefit the both groups in the same way because (1) it is very difficult for the former group to understand such material while not for the latter one, and (2) owing to being difficult it is boring, and thus it demotivates the former, while not the latter group. Due to these reasons, low-level learners and advanced learners cannot be

pedagogically and psychologically exposed to the same level of materials. Therefore the materials we want to create should be appropriate for the target students in terms of difficulty and easiness. Both very easy and very difficult materials can be boring and discouraging. That is why they should be slightly challenging. To this end, Snow and Perkins (1979:52) state:
'... materials must be neither too easy or too difficult, but set at an appropriate level in order to challenge the student to actively understand, form hypotheses, and try to clear up ambiguities.'

• The difficulty of web materials can be adjusted by providing or withdrawing support materials (i.e. dictionaries, grammar structures, and pictures). The factors that affect the difficulty (i.e. words, grammar structures, topic, length, tasks and so on) need to be considered and support should be provided proportionately. To be able to find out the real level of the target students a needs-analysis test should be administered.

• The materials should be these that interest our learners. If the materials are dull, then the learners can be demotivated. Also we should be aware of the fact that learners with different background cultures might not enjoy the same kind of materials. Even they might hate, which is a disaster (see Markham and Latham 1987:157-70) In order to be able to tease out which type of materials the target learners are interested in, a need analysis questionnaire can be conducted before deciding to select appropriate topics as Seedhouse (1996:63-74) conducted in her study.

• The flexibility of the materials is also an important issue. The preparation of web materials takes a long-time, and teachers are generally very busy. Thus, the materials that can be used at different times and for several objectives should be preferred. Some types of materials can become, in terms of the content, out of date very soon, and this might cause frustration. Today's news, for example, is out of data for tomorrow's learner.

• The materials should complement those taught in the classroom.

They should complete what has been taught before in terms of the type of input, familiarity and unfamiliarity, explicitness of input (coherency). New types should also be gradually supplied.

• Materials should not be very long as this can cause frustration and boredom. Additionally, spelling mistakes must also be avoided. A wrong spelling can result in mis-learning. It should not also be forgotten that clear, short and informative titles can be very beneficial (Anderson & Lynch 1989:48).

• Finally if we can afford, it is better to create multimedia web materials so that the learners can benefit from different elements such as sound, video clips, texts, pictures and images as all of them have their own value and role in language learning (see, for example, Omagigo 1979, Secules et al. 1992 for visual clues). All these elements should be exploited carefully.

Adding web links:

• Firstly, all links considered for connection should be those that the target learners definitely need. In other words, the priority of the links should be given to those that the learners need most. This can be decided according to the learners' needs and learning objectives. Under normal conditions, language learners are normally already busy enough. So there is no point in taking up the already busy learners' time by providing them with the links which might be interesting and attractive, but not necessary and useful at the moment or at all. The best thing, maybe, is not to make them aware of such sources as this removes a temptation to experiment, and thus prevents time-wasting.

• The number of links, even if all are useful and beneficial, should not be too large. Rather than connecting more links, it will be to the learners' advantage if they are only provided with limited but (most) beneficial ones. If we need to give an example, it is worth here saying

that rather than providing links to many daily papers, and weekly and monthly journals and magazines, it is more logical to provide links to only some papers, journals and magazines which we think are more useful in terms of content, the use of English, the learners' learning objectives, and their level.

• The web links should be checked at regular intervals because, as known, the addresses of web sources can change at any time, and also need to be improved and updated. Once the learners realise that the links are not working properly, and out of date, then this might discourage and demotivate them: a disaster from the point of view of language learning.

• Like web materials, web links should also complement what is taught in the classroom and what we target to achieve.

In conclusion, it should not be forgotten that as in many teaching and learning situations, here again it falls to us, materials writers and teachers, to guide and lead the learners in order for them to be able to utilise the Internet sources fully. If we want to succeed in this, then it is vitally necessary to conduct post-study needs-analysis questionnaires and interviews so that we can find out the usefulness and useless of the web materials and links. According to the results of such consultation, the necessary precautions can be taken and the site can be revised.

The sample materials

It is pedagogically necessary to mention that this material was created for a specific group of learners in mind. To enable the reader to be aware of the assumptions and reasons behind this material, we shall first give necessary information about the target learners, and then we shall illustrate the materials and explain the reasons and assumptions.

The target learners: The target learners of these materials are intermediate and above undergraduate English language teacher trainees at The University of Yuzuncuyil, (Faculty of Education, Department of English Language and Teaching) in Van, Turkey. They study English for four years, and in order to be able to graduate as English teachers they have to attend and pass all the available taught courses. In terms of cultural background the target students have a heterogeneous background because different cultures are dominant in different regions of Turkey as she is a multi-lingual country. In terms of educational background they have a roughly homogenous background since (1) there is only one official language of institutions, (2) education in minority languages is forbidden, and (3) all primary, secondary and high schools possess more or less similar curricula.
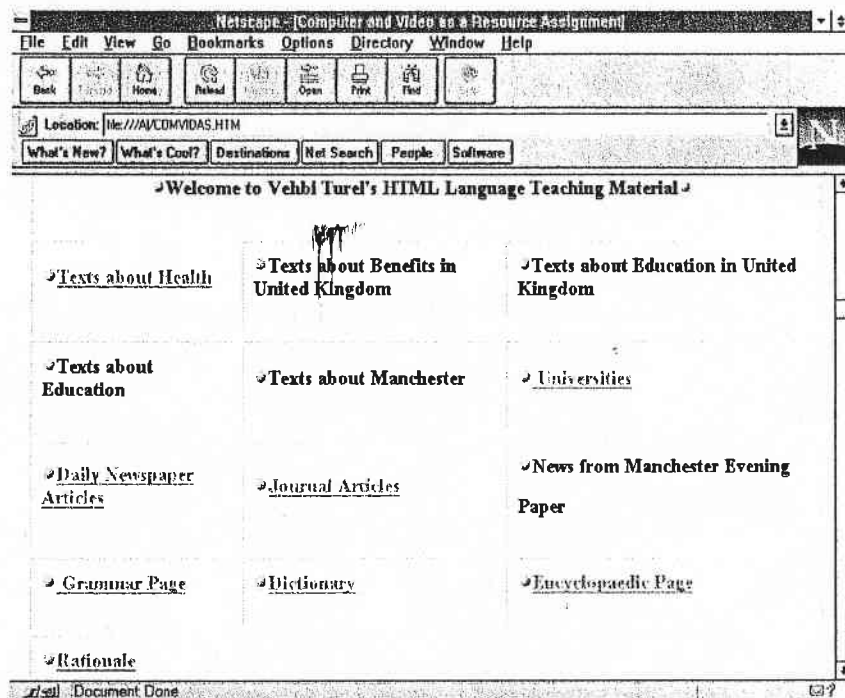

Figure: 1. Home Page (the content of the material)

Although the students have a good grammatical knowledge, this is sometimes passive. They have, in order of importance, serious listening, speaking, writing and reading problems.

The Sample materials: The materials were created for the above mentioned learners for self-study. They comprise language learning materials and links to the Internet pages that are thought to be beneficial, and can enhance and develop the target students' language and learning environment. They consist of reading texts -texts about health, texts about education, texts about benefits in The United Kingdom, texts about Manchester, texts about education in The United Kingdom -; and links – daily newspapers, journals, news from Manchester Evening Paper, grammar sources, dictionary, encyclopaedic page – as illustrated in the figure below.

The next section gives reasons for the creation of these particular materials and explains the assumptions behind these goals. While we do this, only one of the reading texts, and some links will be focused on as all the other materials were more or less created in the similar way. One of the reading texts is about health (pictures about smoking, smoking and our child (text I), smoking and our child (text II), smoking and our child (text III), immunisation). The reason for choosing these texts is that

1   they are authentic,
2   they provide learners with vocabulary about this specific topic,
3   the topics - smoking, migraine, immunisation -, are the ones with which many target learners are familiar and also they feature many international cognates which make them easier understood.

When the materials were designed the aim was to make them attractive. To this purpose, visual aids (see figure 2) were used, and support materials such as glossary (see figure 3) and grammar explanations (see figure 4) were provided, which we believe help the target learners a lot in terms of motivation as well as acquisition because they help learners comprehend better, which motivates and results in acquisition.
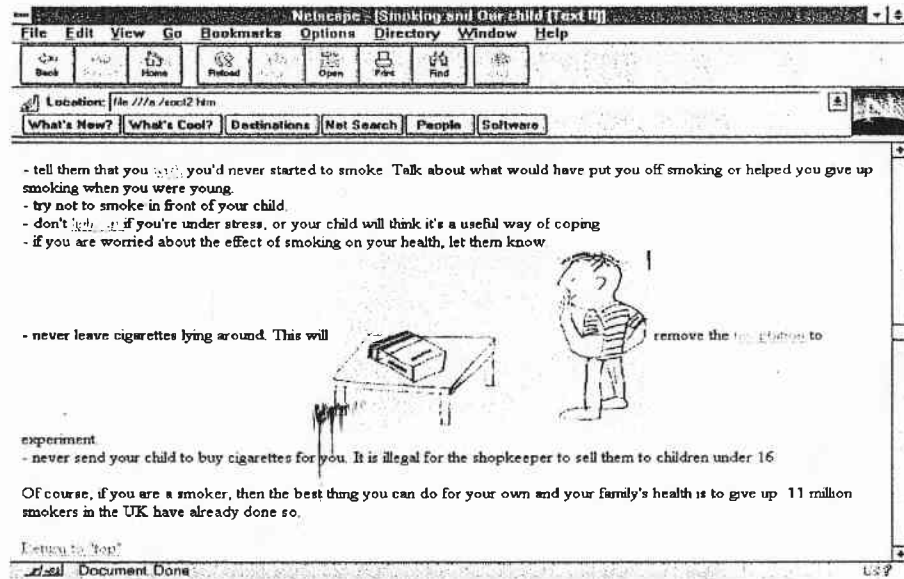
Figure 2: An example of pictures in Web language materials. (This picture was taken from NHS leaflet "Smoking and Our Health")
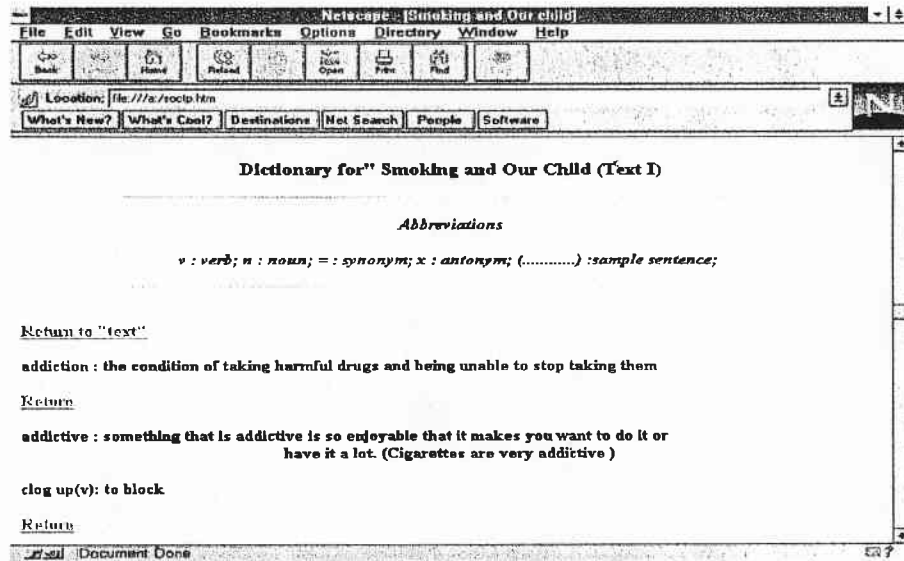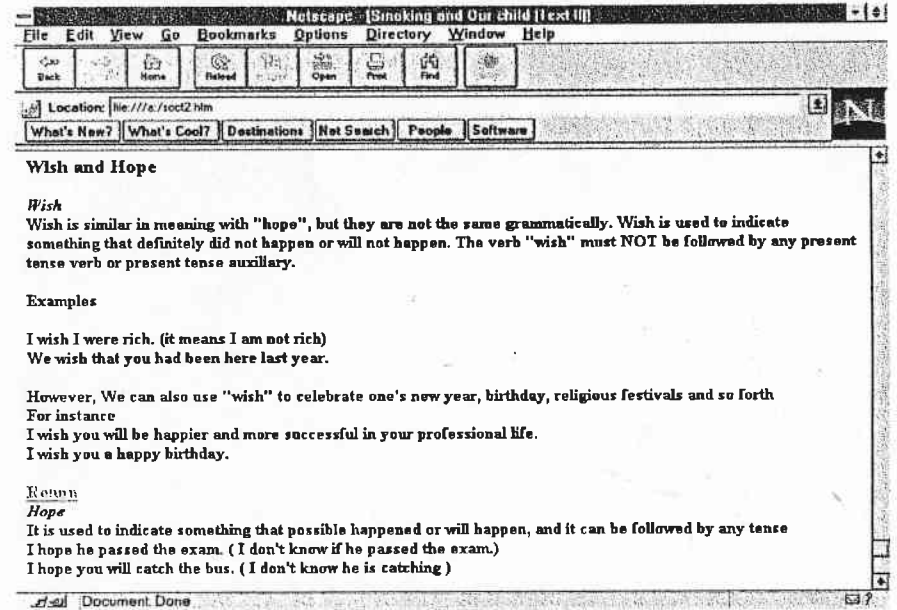

Figure 3: Glossary

Figure 4: Grammar Explanations.

They also attract their attention to the points (see, for example, figure 2) that are believed to be important.

The new words and grammar structures, which it is thought the learners do not know, are click-able and if the users need or want to learn, they can click and review. There are also additional pictures about smoking produced (1) to help learners to understand the reading texts better, (2) to be used in the classroom as support materials for preparing the learners to discuss 'Should smoking be forbidden in public places or not? Why?' for an hour-class. Most of the pictures were not put on the text pages so that retrieval of the text pages would not take a long time which might cause frustration. Instead, they were put on separate web pages, and those who want to view them can click and have a look.

The sample links:

The links are to universities, daily newspaper articles, journals, on-line grammar sources, dictionaries, and encyclopaedias. The reasons for providing these links are explained below.

The *universities* link provides access for the students to British and American universities. The aim of this link is to enable the students, who want to have their master degrees after their first degrees, to have information about any British and American universities because the target learners generally want to maintain their post-graduate studies either in The United Kingdom or The United States of America.

The *daily newspapers and journals* link enables the students to access The Guardian, The Times, The Financial Times, The Irish Times, The New York Times, CNN Interactive, Time Magazine, The Economist. The aim of this page is to enable the target learners to access authentic materials. This is, in terms of two points, is very important. Firstly, because of the place the target students live they lack authentic materials, but this link can bridge this gap. Secondly, authentic materials are 'real' language, and these materials have the features of 'real' language. Therefore, if we do not give our target students the opportunity of dealing with authentic materials, then they will face with some problems when they meet them, and speak to authentic (i.e. native) speakers. For these reasons, if we do not want the target learners to have such problems, then they should be given the opportunity of reading authentic materials because, as Nunan (1989:54) points out, inauthentic materials do not prepare the learners adequately for coping with the authentic materials they hear and read in real world outside classroom. Therefore, it can be said this is a very useful link for the target learners.

Since the target students are undergraduate English language teacher trainees other links such as TESOL Journal, IATEFL, NATESOL, and Language and Literature sources were connected to help the target students to improve their knowledge in the field of teaching English as a second language. This also enables them to be aware of new developments in the field because such sources provide up-to-date and active information about language learning and teaching problems, solutions, methods and new developments.

The *grammar sources and dictionaries* link provides access to On-line English Grammar and dictionaries. At the moment they may not be very

effective, but in the future certainly there will be some innovative grammar and dictionaries available. If the students need to learn any grammar structure, and find out what an unfamiliar word mean, they can access these links, and study what they want. It can help the students specially when they do not have any grammar books and dictionaries with themselves at the moment they need.

The *encyclopaedic* link provides access to Encyclopaedic Britannica. Although for long-term use you can access only on subscription, access for short-time is free at present. This link can help the learners to find out detailed information about different topics such as English poets, authors, terms, proverbs, culture of Britain. All these are necessary for the target learners because not only do they learn English language, but also they take courses or modules such as British literature, geography, and, to a lesser extent, American literature.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that these web pages (language learning materials and links) can help the target learners. Due to the environment they live in, it is hard for them to find any daily and weekly authentic materials they need. Even if it were possible, the learners would have to pay to have such daily papers and weekly or monthly journals, which cannot be afforded by every single student. The Internet sources, on the other hand, can be accessed free by the students Therefore, not only will such current links and materials provide them with authentic materials and up-to-date information, but they also help the learners, who are going to be future English teachers, to be aware of the innovative educational technology. We also believe that on condition such self-access opportunities as well as the other autonomous facilities (i.e. tape cassettes, satellite broadcasting, CD-ROMS, video) are provided for all learners, then what is taught in the classroom can be improved. In this article, we have tried to account for the basic essential points that need to be considered, but, depending on the target learners' learning objectives and their levels, inevitably, these are not the only points that we need to take heed of when we create materials. (See, for example, McDonough and Shaw 1994, Lautamatti

1978 for some more details which can also be applied in the creation of web materials.)

Notes:

1* See for example, on-line TOEFL sample tests for language learners at **http://www2.big.or.Jp/~webtest/.** These pages were created by Kouichi SATA, who is an English teacher in Japan. He also gave a presentation on these pages at 97 International CALL conference in Exeter.

2* Those who are interested in having a look at the materials in detail can have them for 50p. If you want them posted to you, then you are supposed to pay £1.00. **Corresponding address:** Vehbi Turel, Celse, The Faculty of Education, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M19.

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Acknowledgement: