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### 3. University of St Andrews CALL Project

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**Course : Various Modern Languages**

**Software : TLTP Tell Consortium**

**Gapmaster (WIDA)**

**Storyboard (WIDA)**

**LUISA (Leeds University)**

**This case study describes how a Modern Languages department, having decided to use learning technology, effected its implementations in a range of different courses. The key factors contributing to the success of this Implementation were:**

- **the support of the heads of department and the head of school**
- **adequate time was found for software selection, staff development, materials development, testing, booking of hardware and the setting up of software;**
- **throughout the planning, implementation and evaluation phases, dates were agreed on and kept;**
- **the computer activities were completely integrated with the course content;**
- **attendance was a compulsory part of the course;**
- **the students were assessed on the content of the sessions.**

#### **Introduction**

At the beginning of the 1994-95 session, the School of Modern Languages (SML) set up a Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) Committee to investigate the potential of CALL in the various courses taught within the School. The committee was set up by the Head of School with the full backing of the heads of all the language departments. The project reported here was initiated and supported by this committee and financed by the Head of School.

The formation of the committee enabled departments to share existing expertise, of which the Spanish Department had the lion's share, to explore common problems, and to agree cross-departmental plans which were

both cost-effective and which would ensure continuing collaboration in CALL.

The LTDI Implementation Support Consultant for Modern Languages was invited to join the Committee and to work with departmental representatives in the planning, implementation and evaluation stages of the project which emerged from the initial deliberations.

#### **Project aims and objectives**

The broad aims of the project were

(I) to enable staff in the School of Modern Languages to explore alternative teaching strategies

(II) to enable staff to develop their knowledge of, and expertise in the use of CALL to enrich the student learning environment and to improve the efficiency of student learning.

The Committee decided to focus on CALL provision for first year French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish courses for specialist linguists as each department felt that these students needed additional opportunities to develop their knowledge and use of the grammar of the target language taught in lectures and tutorials. It was felt that timetabled, computer-based activities were most likely to meet the defined need.

#### **Software selection**

It was agreed that the software chosen should be as simple to implement as possible, given the constraints on availability of staff time and programming resources.

The availability of the GRAMEX and GRAMDEF software from the TELL consortium, in French, German, Italian and Spanish for the 1996-97 session was noted and plans were discussed for the linking of the content of that software to the grammar courses.

After a software sampling workshop, it was decided that the initial implementations in the 1995-6 session should be closely targeted, limited in scope, fully financed and formally

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evaluated. Two well-tried authoring packages were selected (GAPMASTER and STORYBOARD, WIDA 1983) which, whilst being easy to set up and use for both staff and students, were in keeping with the learning outcomes envisaged by the staff of the three departments (French, German and Italian) which planned to use them. The software was available in Mac and PC versions which facilitated the timetabling of student access to hardware. Integration with existing materials and course content was ensured in that the lecturers with responsibility for the delivery of the grammar course controlled the content of the software.

GAPMASTER is a very flexible program in which the user fills in blanks in passages of text. It can be used in 'tutorial' and 'test' mode. STORYBOARD is a text reconstruction program which promotes the use of a wide range of language learning strategies recognised as being characteristic of successful language learners.

In addition to the two authoring tools, the Italian department decided also to make use of LUISA, a dedicated grammar package developed at the University of Leeds for use by *ab initio* students in need of intensive grammar practice.

The Russian department planned the introduction of WinCalis units and software developed to support a new course book which they intended to adopt. The department is also involved independently in the development of a Russian Alphabet tutor for beginners.

The Spanish department opted to continue to use its existing STANCALL software which has proved popular with several generations of students, whilst pressing on with the development of a CD ROM to support an existing course.

### **Practical considerations**

At the beginning of the project, the CALL Committee enlisted the support of one of the university's computing officers who had a personal interest in language learning and a brief to support the integration of computer-based learning materials into existing courses. This was an important move which did much to ensure that staff development workshops ran smoothly and that the implementations

themselves were comparatively free from technical problems.

The LTDI Implementation Support Consultant liaised regularly with the Computing Officer and, between them, they were able to make the practical arrangements necessary to implement the plans of the committee, such as the setting up of workshops, thereby freeing hard-pressed lecturers to concentrate on other tasks within the project which only they could undertake.

### **Project overview**

Once the initial decision had been taken about which software to use, staff identified the exact grammar points which they wanted to support with computer-based activities. Licences for the two authoring packages were purchased and a series of workshops was arranged which examined the software from the point of view of the learning outcomes that it could deliver, the kind of support needed by students to use the packages, and the practical issues concerned with the authoring itself.

Towards the end of the 1994-95 session part-time research assistants were engaged to input the texts which had been developed by the lecturers involved in giving the related lectures and classes. The involvement of lecturers outwith the CALL committee helped to spread awareness of the project and ownership of it. A workshop was run for them which gave an overview of the student program, but which was mainly concerned with the technicalities of authoring. The texts were input and tested during the vacation prior to use with students during the first semester of the 1995-96 session.

Before the end of the 1994-95 session an evaluation workshop was held at which evaluation strategies were discussed, plans drawn up and a timetable agreed.

Bookings for the computer labs were also made before the end of the session and as were arrangements to mount the software and relevant files in good time for the first classes. The number of students involved (300+) made heavy demands on hardware resources and the help of the Computing Officer was crucial in securing the hardware and installing the software.

Post-graduate students were recruited to supervise the timetabled lab sessions and to

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introduce the software to the students who also had handbooks prepared by individual departments.

The implementations took place during the first semester of the 1995-96 session and evaluation reports were presented to the CALL committee at their meeting in January 1996.

#### **Staff concerns**

It was clear from the early stages of the project that there was some resistance to CALL in most of the departments of the School. Nevertheless, some of those with misgivings agreed to become involved and attitudes changed during the course of the project. This was in part due to the efficient management of the committee and the active dissemination through departmental meetings of the decisions of the committee and of the progress of the project.

Another important factor in the change of attitudes and in the growing confidence of those actively involved in the project were the workshop sessions. These were fixed well in advance on a date and at a time convenient to all concerned. They were held in the Computing Centre, well away from office telephones and alternative corridor meetings. Refreshments were provided. The workshops were financed through the university's staff development scheme. They were clearly structured, and set up well in advance by the Computing Officer in collaboration with the LTDI Implementation Support Consultant.

#### **Implementation and Evaluation**

##### **The French Department**

The French department stated in their student handbook that the aim of the core CALL course was 'to reinforce and consolidate the learning of the grammar which is covered in lectures and language classes'. All first year post-highers students were required to attend 5 fortnightly classes using the STORYBOARD and GAPMASTER software, and were also offered self-access materials associated with their course book, *Le Français en Faculté*, and a translation package, *Bon Accord*, developed at Aberdeen University by Brian Farrington.

At the end of the final compulsory CALL session, students were invited to complete and hand in evaluation questionnaires. The response rate was disappointingly low at 20%. However, it was felt that this was due in part to

the comparatively informal request for returns, made by the post-graduate students who monitored the sessions, rather than by the tutors.

Of the questionnaires returned, 80% of the replies indicated a positive response to the exercises in terms of their usefulness and in terms of helping them to reinforce their knowledge of the grammar points in question. The students appreciated the help of the post-graduate students in connection with the running of the software and with grammar points. In practice, there had been few difficulties with running the software, due to the clear instructions in the student handbook, which received a positive response from 90% of the students who returned a questionnaire.

Only 18% of students claimed to have used the self-access software which fulfilled the lecturers' expectations that attendance would be poor if it was voluntary.

##### **The German Department**

As with the French students, the German *ab initio* students were required to attend a fortnightly CALL class. This class was designed to replace a class taught by a lecturer. The exercises on offer followed the course book studied by the first year *ab initio* students and were intended to provide grammar revision and consolidation. Each grammar topic was offered at two levels, to meet the needs of quick workers.

The department undertook an open evaluation of the classes in terms of student attitude by requesting students to record their comments at the end of each class. The post-graduate supervisor also recorded her comments. The department also required students to record which exercises they had completed.

Some problems were experienced early in the semester concerned with the conversion of files from Mac to PC format, and student unwillingness to read instructions! Overall, the students' comments were favourable and they offered constructive ideas for future CALL work. The staff involved concluded that they felt that this is a line of teaching worth pursuing. They plan to investigate more sophisticated software and also to look into the possibility of computer-based marking of objective tests.

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### **The Italian Department**

The department embarked on an ambitious plan to use the LUISA package, GAPMASTER and STORYBOARD as integrated units of work within the 'grammar', 'video' and 'practical' components of the Level 1 *ab initio* course. LUISA was used for grammar practice after the relevant structure had been introduced in the grammar class. It was also used for vocabulary building. GAPMASTER and STORYBOARD were used to provide written practice in the use of vocabulary and structures presented to students on audio or video tape during the 'video' and 'practical' classes.

The department was clear in its objectives for the introduction of CALL. They wanted to reduce the time spent by tutors on grammar practice and reading comprehension, thereby freeing time to concentrate on more interactive aspects of language teaching. They also wanted to reduce the time spent on marking grammar exercises by using LUISA's in-built assessment tool.

From the students' point of view, they wanted to give them opportunities for grammar practice where they could work at their own pace, to some extent in their own time, and with immediate feedback. In addition to the LUISA assessments, all other work done in the CALL sessions was assessed, in written or oral assignments away from the computer. Attendance levels at the pre-booked sessions were unsatisfactory. However, this did not indicate that students were not doing the work, simply that they were doing it when it suited them.

Student response to all the activities was evaluated by questionnaire. It appeared that the LUISA grammar exercises were seen as helpful. The vocabulary exercises in LUISA and the STORYBOARD and GAPMASTER activities were seen as less helpful. Students did not feel that the connection between the exercises and the rest of the course was always clear. They also found the exercises quite challenging and complained that the amount of work set was too much. Despite the students' reservations, staff noted that the CALL activities had made a positive contribution in the three areas identified earlier and considered that the CALL classes had had a positive effect on student motivation.

As students had experienced difficulty in getting access to hardware, even when sessions had been booked, the department suggested that the possibility of a CALL computing lab for the exclusive use of language students should be investigated. They also felt that staff supervising CALL classes should receive basic training in the use of PCs, trouble shooting and running induction sessions. They were also keen to see access to the software from computers based in the halls of residence.

The department plans to purchase software dealing with more basic grammar for level 1 students. They intend to use LUISA with level 2 students and to continue to develop GAPMASTER and STORYBOARD activities for both levels. They also plan to use GAPMASTER to replace pen and paper assignments in the second semester to cut down further on tutor's marking time.

### **Follow-up**

As a follow-up to the work described above, the computing officer set up a one day CALL seminar for the staff of the School at the beginning of the second semester of the 1995-96 session. June Thompson, manager of the CTI Centre for Modern Languages at the University of Hull spoke about integration issues and made available a wide range of software for evaluation by staff, including the products of the TELL consortium. Nina Garrett, on a visit to Scotland from the Wesleyan University in Connecticut, was also invited to talk to staff about her research into foreign language acquisition theory, advanced technologies and foreign language pedagogy. Some 25 members of the School of Modern Languages took part, interest in the software on offer was high and several members of staff discussed possible research topics.

### **Future plans**

The School has formed a partnership with the University of Abertay Dundee and the University of Dundee in a SHEFC funded project designed to develop shared language learning resources to be distributed through the FAT MAN (Fife and Tayside Metropolitan Area Network). Materials will be produced in French, German and Spanish for use in all three of the universities. In order to facilitate the use of the materials at St Andrews, a CALL computer lab is to be provided with funding coming in part from the SHEFC project and in part from the university.