

ICT in Language Teaching Analysis of Select Software

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Abstract— In the field of language learning, several information communication technologies have been developed; a few of them are prominent and widely used, but the rest remain largely ignored, even though they may be highly effective. On the other hand, these ICTs are mainly used by individuals rather than by formal educational institutions. Moreover, due to dearth of open source software, users hesitate to take initiatives in purchasing packages that might actually be very useful. This paper attempts to highlight a few software packages, apps, and interactive social media (primarily developed for language learning) that can be effectively used in formal language teaching, which are of a nominal cost or free of cost, easily available, user-friendly and reduce the amount of time invested in language teaching in a traditional classroom set-up. Taking such criteria into account, Duolingo, Rosetta Stone, Livemocha, Konkanverter, Google Translate are the software packages that will be dealt with in the paper.

Keywords- social media; ICT; Duolingo; Konkanverter; language; translation; transliteration

I. INTRODUCTION

Using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in language teaching and learning is not a new practice. In the paper concerning positive effects of ICT on foreign language teaching, Isisag opines that “The use of ICT in language learning not only involves pedagogical changes for teachers but also involves environmental and pedagogical changes for learners who are traditionally used to face-to-face teaching in classrooms”[1]. ICT not only makes language learning interactive, but also maintains a record of progress and the learner can get feedback without fearing the teacher’s criticism [1]. ICT entered the field of language teaching in the form of interactive software made available on CDs. Now with the advent of smart phones and the widespread use of the Internet, it is available and accessible anytime and anywhere in the form of websites, software applications, social media, mobile apps and other software tools.

The software applications that are discussed in this paper are aimed at individual language learning, and not designed for conventional classroom teaching. Kalnina and Kangro in their research paper ‘ICT in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning at University Of Latvia in the light of the Fiste Project’ [2] provide a significant insight with regard to language learning. In their opinion, according to educational psychology “significant learning takes place only when the learner actively constructs his own learning”. This leads to a paradigm shift from a teaching centered model to a learning

centered one, focusing on “constructing knowledge, discovering the world and entering intercultural multilingual communication via e-learning”. This seems to justify the single-user interface of these softwares. But the possibilities that these applications open to formal teaching cannot be ignored. For a successful and interactive functioning of TELL (Technology Enhanced Language Learning) [3], such softwares need to be introduced in formal learning environments.

Two of the five softwares that are discussed in this paper, namely Duolingo and Livemocha can be labeled as social media. Social media can be defined as “collaborative media creation and sharing” [4]. Social media is looked upon as distractive to learning; however, the picture is changing. Social media such as Skype and instant messaging are being used by learners in school to share information and work in collaboration [4]. Online language learning communities fuse learning and collaboration and bring learners as well as language experts together. They add a human dimension to technology in language learning, thereby increasing information sharing at a global level.

The paper would like to discuss the software applications/tools with reference to a study conducted as a part of classes taken for the students of Nihon University, Japan, who are currently undertaking a five-month course at Goa University under the initiative of Study India Programme. The Department of English, Goa University conducts English language classes for the SIP students. The study was conducted for a month, from September – October 2014.

For the sake of convenience, the paper would like to borrow two basic terms from translation studies: source language and target language. The former would refer to the native language/ language of instruction, and the latter would refer to the language that is being taught to the learners.

II. ANALYSIS OF SELECT SOFTWARE

A. Duolingo

Named Google Play's "Best of the Best" 2013[5], Duolingo is one of the most interactive and easy to use applications which has both smart phone as well as desktop versions. It is free of cost and easily available on Google Play for android phones. However the Japanese SIP students had some difficulty in installing it on their iOS (iPhone Operating System) through App Store. Only one out of the fifteen SIP students had used Duolingo earlier for learning Italian. The size of the application varies according to the device [5].



Figure 1. Duolingo.

The application begins with vocabulary building and not with alphabets, and can be most effectively used for learning the popular European languages. It uses immersion technique of language teaching, through visuals, audio and translation, and requires the learner to respond by text, with instant feedback feature. At the end of each lesson, Duolingo displays a graph of progress, and provides positive reinforcements through ‘hearts’ and ‘lingots’. It also notifies with email reminders about practice time and revision. The desktop version of Duolingo functions like a language learning community where the members discuss, and help each other in learning the target language. It also saves the progress of the learner on the website which one can access by logging in.

Using DeLeS, a computer program that detects the learning styles of online learners, it was found that learners have “the sensing/intuitive dimension, the active/reflective and sequential/global dimension in learning online respectively. This means more students like to learn facts and concrete material from their sensory and predictive outcome than get involved in discussing and reflecting on the provided information”[6]. Duolingo caters to all these three dimensions.

In a formal classroom environment, Duolingo can function as an interest-building interactive app. It can help the teacher/instructor/ facilitator lay the foundation of the target language in the minds of the learners by introducing basic vocabulary, simple verb forms, gender and number in the target language. Once the base is established, the teacher can proceed to the more formal aspects of the target language, to which students will be able to positively contribute due to their experience with Duolingo. Thus learners will no longer remain passive recipients of knowledge (as in the case of a conventional classroom) but will contribute to greater interactivity in the classroom.

B. Rosetta Stone

Rosetta Stone is a software application designed for formal language learning. It is not free, and is available in CD version and also can be downloaded from the Rosetta Stone official website. There is also an app available on Google Play for smart phones, which offers a free trial and beyond that one has

to pay for the entire language course. None of the SIP students had used Rosetta Stone for learning any language.

The software works on the technique of immersion. Each standard language course has four core lessons, which further have nine components each: Pronunciation, Vocabulary, Grammar, Listening and Reading, Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking and Review. It starts with the basics, and at the end of the course the learner can have a fair working knowledge of the target language. The course provides maximum interactivity a learner can get from a TELL tool. It uses visuals, audio, text features and involves text and voice inputs for recording responses. There is an option known as ‘Homeschool Dashboard’ wherein the teacher/instructor/facilitator can assess the work of the learner, check his/her progress and assign or edit the curriculum.

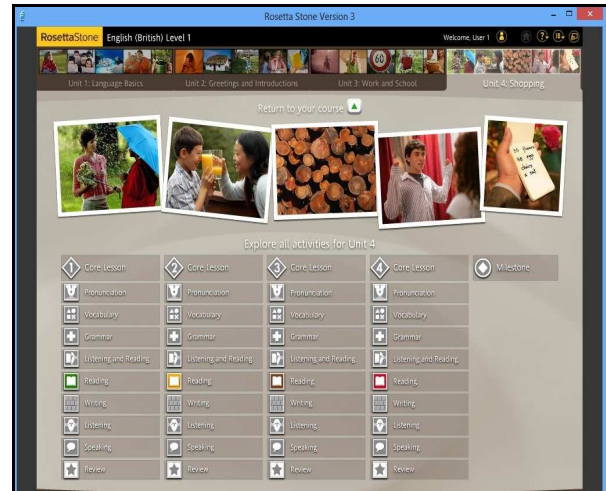


Figure 2. Rosetta Stone.

Rosetta Stone can be a very useful software for daily language classes. It is expensive for a single user/learner, but if the institution funds it, it will help with the target language classes immensely.

C. Livemocha

Livemocha is an online language learning community website that functions like a social network. It is made up of ‘language enthusiasts’ encompassing both professionals and non-professionals.

The SIP students had to be introduced to Livemocha as none of them was aware of the website. The learner has to mention his or her native language while creating an account. Once the account is created, the learner has to choose the language he/she desires to learn. Every language course has levels (from Fundamentals to Superior) which are further classified into lessons. A learner can buy a lesson with the help of ‘coins’. The learner is initially allotted a certain amount of coins. These coins can be exchanged for lessons and earned back on completion of the lessons. Each lesson is divided into parts such as Introduction, Vocabulary, Usage, Usage Practice, Read/Write, Read/Speak, Listen/Write, and Listen/Speak. The learner can also earn coins by helping others in the Livemocha community. There is another

currency known as ‘beans’, which can be purchased by the learner and can be used to gain access to other options on the website. The course uses visual, audio, text and translation features and accepts voice and text responses. At a higher level, the learner can have conversations via text, audio or video chat with experts and other learners on Livemocha.

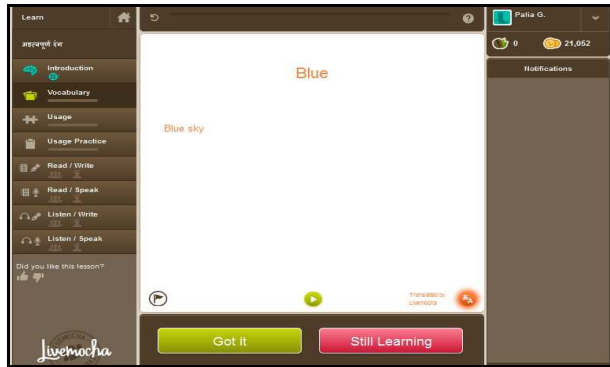


Figure 3. Livemocha.

The teacher/instructor/facilitator can introduce the students to Livemocha and ask them to create their accounts. The teacher/instructor/facilitator can, through his own account, correct the exercises of the learners and with additional access add/design lessons for the learners; “can not only update or complete the existing ready-made courses, but he can tailor the course according to the specific needs of his learners”[3]. This would not only help the learners of one particular classroom but also the people interested in the target language all over the globe, as the lessons will be available for anyone who is interested in learning the target language.

D. Konkolverter

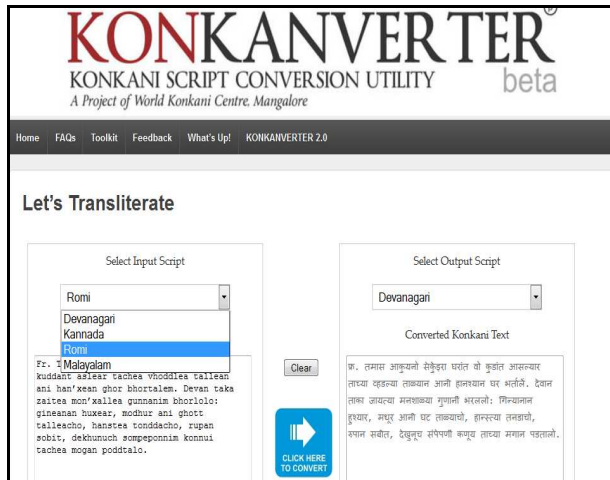


Figure 4. Konkolverter.

Although this tool is region-specific, it is included in the paper to give a general idea of how such a tool can contribute to language teaching. Konkolverter is a tool built out of a project by World Konkani Centre, Mangalore, to bring down constraints within the language. Konkani language has five recognized scripts, namely Devanagari, Romi, Kannada,

Malayalam and Perso-Arabic. This disparity in scripts creates intra-lingual barriers which make writings in Konkani inaccessible even to a native-Konkani speaker who has limited or no knowledge of all these five scripts. In such a situation, Konkolverter comes to the rescue. It functions as a transliteration tool that can currently convert to and from four out of five known scripts of Konkani (Perso-Arabic is presently excluded). Though still in its beta stage, it is fairly accurate, considering the amount of influence region, culture and script can have on language. For the learners of Konkani language, this tool becomes a key with which different realms of the same language can be unlocked and explored.

E. Google Translate

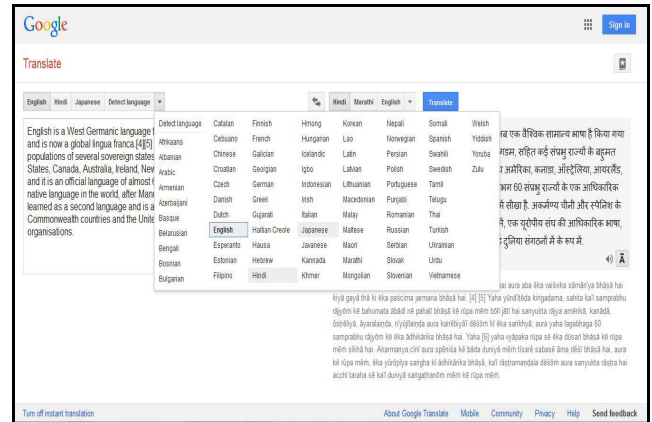


Figure 5. Google Translate.

Translation is a step ahead of language learning, but very much a part of it. Only that person who is proficient in a target language can do justice to the translation. Google Translate is the most popular translating tool on the Internet, and is able to translate to and from more than seventy-five languages currently. It gives best results with translations of simple and straightforward sentences, as do many machine translation tools. It is known to translate documents and web pages. It also allows the user to listen to the translation, and even provides a phonetic transcription. Additionally, it gives the user an option to improve translation which can contribute to the accuracy of the translation. While working with the SIP students, Google Translate helped introduce the Duolingo Desktop version which is also available in Japanese and was used for the Japanese students’ convenience.

In a traditional language classroom set-up, Google Translate can help assist language lessons at three levels. At the introductory phase of language teaching, the teacher/instructor/facilitator can ask the learners to translate simple phrases or sentences from source language to target language manually, and check their accuracy using Google Translate. At an intermediate phase, the learners can be made to translate sentences manually and then, by using Google Translate check the accuracy of the machine translation. Furthermore, the learners can experiment with reverse translation in Google Translate and see the changes that take place when matter is translated from one language to another. At an advanced stage, learners can translate documents

through Google Translate, and use the draft to develop a final translation.

III. CONCLUSION

The above ICTs are either wholly free or available at a nominal cost. All one needs is a computer or a smart phone with a good Internet connection to run these software applications. Currently they are not being widely used in language classrooms although there is a huge scope for them to become popular tools in educational institutions. One has to explore and encourage their utility in language classrooms. In the years to come it is inevitable that ICT will be used in a far greater measure in and outside the classrooms for language teaching and learning.

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