Digital resources

ITILT mini-guide

Interactive Teaching in Languages with Technology

itilt2.eu

iTILT

Technology in language teaching

Introduction
digital resources for language education

What do we mean by digital resources?

By digital resources we mean materials for teaching and learning that can be used with computers or mobile devices including text, images, audio, and video. Resources for language learning and teaching may include

- exercises and activities typical of textbooks;

- reference materials such as dictionaries and encyclopaedias; or

- any other target language material.

Resources may be designed specifically for educational purposes, such as teaching and learning language or another content area, or they may be meant for other uses, such as entertainment.

Particularly useful for teaching and learning are **open** resources:

> "Open educational resources (OER) are materials that may be freely accessed, reused, modified and shared to support teaching and learning at all levels of education."
>
> Commonwealth of Learning, 2017

Open resources avoid problems of copyright and plagiarism by licensing materials to be used without cost, allowing both teachers and learners to share resources.

Why are resources important in language education?

At the most basic level resources are important for language learning and teaching because they provide **input**, that is, samples of the target language or L2.

We use the terms **L1** to refer to a learner's first (native) language or mother tongue, and **L2** to mean any language learned after the first, the **target** of language teaching. Sometimes we also distinguish **second** languages, learned in an environment where the target language is commonly spoken (e.g., Turkish in Turkey), from **foreign** languages, usually referring to classroom learning where the ambient language is different (e.g., English in France). Often, however, the umbrella term **second language** covers both contexts.

Research has shown that learning a second language involves the development of an **interlanguage** or systematic learner language which calls on subconscious processes which are largely independent of explicit teaching. Some of these findings and implications for teaching are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: interlanguage and individual differences

	SECOND LANGUAGE RESEARCH FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS FOR SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS
INTERLANGUAGE	Second language learning involves the subconscious development of interlanguage through predictable stages which generally stop short of total mastery for adults; conscious rule-learning does not automatically lead to accurate production. (Lightbown, 2000)	DON'T overemphasise the explicit learning of grammar rules or teach far beyond learners' current competence
	Variability is a key feature of interlanguage, in terms of what is transferred from L1, and individuals' ultimate attainment, which is related to both external factors like context and quantity of input, as well as internal variables such as motivation and aptitude. (Myles, 2002)	DO cater for differences in individual learner preferences and abilities
	The systematic and individual nature of interlanguage development militates against grammar-based curricula and highlights the developmental importance of learner errors. (Myles, 2002)	DON'T expect all learners in a class to be ready to learn the same thing at the same time, or to progress at the same rate: don't prioritise teacher-fronted whole-class lock-step activities

Whyte (2014)

Thus a **grammatical syllabus**, which focuses exclusively on the presentation of target language structures and the correction of learner errors, is not the best way to promote language learning in the form of interlanguage development. Instead we will need to expose learners to a variety of rich, motivating language input in order to activate subconscious learning processes.

The role of this input is to promote language learning rather than to develop knowledge about the culture where the target language is spoken. The same researchers who argue against explicit grammar teaching also suggest learners should focus on more international perspectives of the target language which leave more room for individual expression.

Table 2 shows research recommendations concerning target language **input** and **culture**.

Table 2: input and culture

	SECOND LANGUAGE RESEARCH FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS FOR SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS
INPUT	Instruction should provide extensive input focusing on meaning to allow subconscious interlanguage development; learners should be encouraged to seek additional learning opportunities outside class. (Ellis, 2005)	DO allow time for learning; encourage learners to seek out opportunities outside the classroom
	Because of the complexity of language, second language development is extremely time-consuming; an hour a day will not lead to nativelike proficiency. (Lightbown, 2000)	DO provide rich, contextualised, extensive target language input
	It is easier for learners to understand the target language in context rather than in isolation; learners can also understand complex and accurate language which they are not yet able to produce. (Cook, 1998)	DON'T insist on accurate production of grammatical inflections at early stages of acquisition

	SECOND LANGUAGE RESEARCH FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS FOR SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS
CULTURE	Teachers should promote an international use of the target language rather than focus on target-language speakers and culture, and must also allow for individual learner differences (Cook, 1998)	DON'T focus exclusively on the culture and native speakers of the target language in the design of materials and activities

Whyte (2014)

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is a language teaching method which provides opportunities to avoid an overemphasis on explicit grammar teaching, expose learners to different types of language input, as well as allow space for learner choice. Thus it respects many of the principles for effective teaching established by second language research.

Interactive Teaching in Languages with Technology

iTILT2 Professional Development Resource

August 2017

More information on TBLT can be found in the ITILT project handbook available from the website itilt2.eu or from this link.

In the following chapter, we show how these principles influence our choice of digital resources and how we decide to exploit them.

Resources in focus
an example of digital resources

The ITILT project's approach to integrating technologies in language education is through task-based language teaching (TBLT), where teaching and learning activities are organised in a task sequence. So instead of listing digital resources for teachers to use, we propose in this mini-guide to show how resources can be integrated into tasks.

Overview of the story slam task

Among the French classes involved in the project were students in an undergraduate university course on media and communication for English majors.

University level speaking task

Second year English majors

Tell a story in a class story slam (as in *The Moth*)
"Moth stories are true as remembered
by the storyteller and always told live,
without notes."

Both the idea for the task, and the resources for preparing for it come from the US storytelling organisation *The Moth* (themoth.org). Here is an example of a Moth story:

Jeff Simmermon's "Making Waves" at the Moth Grand Slam, New York, 2015

https://youtu.be/ NOl8WZS3Aoc

The teaching handout for students is shown on the following two pages.

The Moth Story Slam

1. 10 stories on common theme by storytellers whose names are picked out of a hat, scored by teams of judges selected from the audience. Each StorySLAM generates a StorySLAM winner; the winners face off in a GrandSLAM Championship
2. Find out the theme of the night.
    1. Conjure, channel, craft and compose your story.
    2. Practice so you can remember it without the benefits of paper. Then practice it so you can keep it down to five minutes. Revise. Rework. Revamp. Finesse.
    3. Put your name in the hat. If you are one of the lucky 10 picked, you'll have five minutes to woo the audience with tales of your on-theme escapades
3. Contestants are judged on sticking to the five-minute time frame, sticking to the theme and having a story that has a conflict and a resolution.
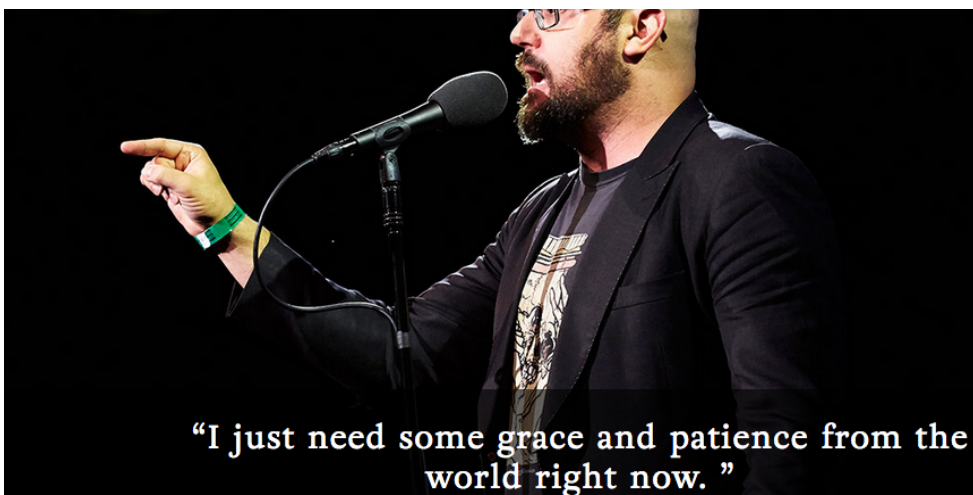
Jeff Simmermon:
Empathetic subway screaming

https://themoth.org/stories/empathetic-subway-screaming

Schedule

Week 4	7 October	Story slam I (8 stories, 2 winners)
Week 6	4 November	Story slam II (8 stories, 2 winners)
Week 9	25 November	Story slam III (8 stories, 2 winners)
Week 11	9 December	Grand slam (6 winners)

Themes

NEIGHBORHOODS: Tell us a story about the nosy grandma two doors down, kids on the stoop, block parties and other local flavors. The guy at the corner store, the church down the road, the playground down the block. Keeping up with the Joneses, glass houses, cups of sugar, banging on the ceiling, parking spot battles or the girl-next door.

PRESSURE: Prepare a five-minute story about urgency. Under the gun or over the dam. Peers, fears, tears and guilt! Scuba dives, chess tournaments, speed dating. Parental expectations. Career ultimatums. Russian roulette. Cue the theme song from Jeopardy.

INK: Prepare a five-minute story involving things written or drawn in ink. Manifestos, diaries, contracts...dotted lines. Commitments! Tattoos you relish or regret. Documents that finally solve the mystery. Notes and letters you wish you take back. The pen is mightier than the sword? Ok, no pencils allowed.

WATER: Prepare a five-minute story involving the culprit of all wetness, WATER. Think rain, the kiddie pool, the ocean, the bathtub, a puddle, thirst, the great amoebae abode, 92% of your blood, snow when it is relaxed, laundry, your fish tank or tears. Water, water everywhere.

BEG BORROW STEAL: Prepare a five-minute story about need, desire, and greed. Extraordinary measures. Swindles, heists and deals with the devil. Robin Hood or hood-winked. Making "it" happen by any means necessary....

LOVERS AND HATERS: Prepare a five minute story about lovers and haters. Tell us a story about those who lifted you up or those who didn't have your back. Love triangles, frenemies, mean girls and nice guys finishing last. Singing praises or throwing some shade, players playing and haters hating.

DOUBT: Prepare a five minute story about questioning. Pondering the space between yes and no, true and false. The existence of God, the tooth fairy, UFOs and soulmates. Wanting to believe or embracing the uncertainty. Second guessing everything beyond a shadow of a doubt. Skeptical, suspicious, hesitant or just curious.

DIVORCE: Prepare a story about liberation from a commitment. Break ups and bust outs. The joy of letting go. The pain of saying goodbye. The agony of splitting up the worldly goods. Cutting out the past. Trimming the excess. Looking in the rearview mirror and building the new. Separating from a spouse, a friend, or even an idea. Bring us your tales of being in the splash zone.

MONEY: Tell of cheapskates and big spenders, misers or millionaires. Pawn shops, spending sprees, eBay deals, and piggy bank funds. Selling your blood or buying a round for the whole bar.

The task sequence involved the following activities, and the main task was to prepare a story to tell in class. Three class were set aside for story slams over the semester of twelve 90-minute sessions: 8 or 10 students each told a personal 5-minute story related to the day's theme. Two winners from each session would then compete in a final grand slam.

Table 3: Storytelling task sequence

	Activity	Website	Link
1	Learn about the Moth story format	The Moth	https://themoth.org/stories
		Transcript editor:	http://storyscribe.themoth.org/
2	**Prepare a story on a chosen theme and deliver it in class**	Optional: be part of the Moth jury to choose winners for grand slam in last class.	
3	Record your story as you tell it in class, and upload it to share with the teacher		
4	Listen to recording with individual feedback from the teacher, and consult general suggestions for improvement		
5	Write a reaction to this experience, including response to feedback, in a final reflective paper		

The resources on the Moth website were used by the teacher and the students in several ways.

1. To introduce the task sequence, the teacher used the "Making waves" story mentioned earlier and

   a) showed the video in class from the link on the Moth website, podcast, or YouTube channel;

   b) completed an automatic transcription of the story using a tool also hosted on the Moth website (which allows users to contribute to the respository) and analysed the text in class;

2. To prepare for the story slams, the students

   a) voted for topics offered on the story slam section of the Moth website;

   b) read instructions and tips for preparing their own stories, and for judging others' stories;

   c) watched one or more videos to analyse in terms of storytelling technique.

3. On story slam days, some students volunteered to serve as judges using an evaluation grid developed from guidelines on the Moth website with respect to timing, theme, and a conflict/resolution format.

Resources	Activities	Other possibilities
The Moth website	Learners explore website to • understand task • listen to examples of stories	• listening comprehension • analysis of stories (techniques, structure)
Empathetic screaming match on NY subway (Jeff Simmermon)	Teacher shows an example of a Moth story on a given theme ("Making waves") and leads analysis of story transcript	**Noticing** activities with transcript and video • what do speaker's intonation and gestures add? • How is the story structured? What cues move the story along? • What tenses are used? How do they correspond to foreground and background information?
Story transcript editor	Teacher used the transcription application (machine transcription with human checking) to verify, correct and complete story transcript	Learners choose a story and correct the transcription • for listening/writing practice • to contribute to Moth bank of machine-transcribed stories

Key qualities of story slam resources

Looking back at the principles of **respecting interlanguage development** and **providing rich input**, we can see how these activities respect the recommendations given in Tables 1 and 2.

First, there is **no explicit focus on grammar**, and certainly no lock-step teaching where the whole class is expected to study a specific grammar point. Instead, the emphasis is on sharing personal experience in the form of stories: students choose a theme of interest, and shape a previous experience to fit the topic. They learn any necessary vocabulary and check grammar on their own in preparation for the story slam.
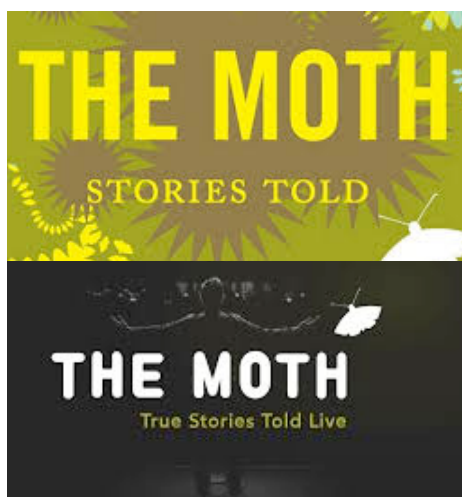
The task leaves a good deal of space for individual learner preferences and abilities. Each student is free to choose what kind of story they wish to share, and decide exactly how they want to convey their ideas in English. Those less confident speaking in public can practice in advance and memorise sections of their stories.

The Moth resources themselves are a **rich source of varied language input**. There is a wide range of videos of stories told by storytellers from many backgrounds, native and non-native speakers, professional entertainers and ordinary people. Learners can choose which to view, whether to look at a transcript, and what to focus on - pronunciation, new words, grammar, or non-linguistic dimensions of storytelling such as gesture and stagecraft. It is easy to imagine different tasks where learners might use the Storyscribe tool to transcribe the story of their choice and conduct some type of linguistic analysis of the transcript and/or video.

The Moth organisation is evidence that the task we ask of our students here is **similar to activities others engage in outside the classroom** for purposes other than learning languages.

While the Moth is certainly a US group with stories told in English, the emphasis is on shared, personal experience rather than American culture. As such, it offers learners the chance to use the target language to develop their own perspectives in the second language.

That said, there is much both in the story slam format and the individual contributions that would lend itself to cultural or intercultural discussion.

Finally, teachers might wonder about feedback and correction: with so much emphasis on exposure to interesting input and participating in a meaningful communicative event, when do we actually attend to learners' errors and give guidance for improvement?

The second part of the task is tackled in our second mini-guide, **Digital Tools,** where we cover steps 3 through 5 in Table 3, that is, the recording and sharing of learners' stories, and ways of providing feedback that is individualised, useable (and used).

First, however, we consider further examples of the types of digital resources available for interactive teaching in a task-based framework drawn from the ITILT project.

From the ITILT project
teacher views of digital resources

Classroom tasks

This section of our mini-guide highlights the use of digital resources in a number of task sequences designed for different educational and proficiency levels.

Is Shakespeare still relevant today? (Secondary English, Belgium)

Akala: Hip-hop and Shakespeare?

https://ed.ted.com/on/kg3xD9lP

This task sequence took inspiration from a TEDEd lesson by Bill Garner using a video on TEDx Talks YouTube channel. After watching this clip in an introductory activity, the learners were each assigned different videos on different aspects of Shakespeare's life and work, which they then summarised for their classmates. The teacher appreciated the effect of this information gap on learner engagement.

> Students were more engaged in the listening task because they needed to convey the content of their video to the other students.

Welsh Book Creator (Primary Welsh, UK)

In this task, digital stories were loaded on to iPads to encourage reading in the target language.

The iPad allows a wider variety of resources to be used – in this case there are more Welsh books available online and accessible on the iPads.

"The death of conversation" (Secondary English, France/Germany)

Another task sequence, which built towards a videoconference exchange between French and German secondary school classes, started with a series of photographs by Babycakes Romero on the theme of "phubbing," or ignoring others by using a smartphone. The French pupils created a questionnaire to survey their peers' habits with respect to phone use, and both French and German classes polled their friends. During the videoconference they discussed their findings.

After the preparation, the excitement: "Now I'm going to talk to someone I can only use English with to make myself understood."

They also learned that even if there were difficulties at the start, once they were overcome it could be quite fun.

GERMAN TEACHER

This activity allows learners to consolidate their learning of vocabulary related to the topic of social uses of mobile technology and the language of reporting (percentages, comparative structures). The exchange with the German class provides a real-world context, since the remote class is both a source of information and an audience for the report.

FRENCH TEACHER

In class you talk about things that aren't actually happening and don't make any sense. In the videoconference you can't do that. You have to make an effort so that what you say makes sense.

GERMAN LEARNERS

Recommended resources

These examples show how tasks can be developed from video resources, digital books, and images, and exploited in the classroom using a variety of tools, from tablets, to online tools, and web conferencing.

The wide range of materials available online and their sometimes ephemeral nature makes it unwise to recommend specific sources. It is no doubt more efficient for teachers to curate their own evolving collections of resources, particularly in collaboration with other colleagues. Ways to do this are suggested in our third mini-guide **Digital Networks**.

Here however, are some recommendations from teachers and partners in the ITILT project:

ITILT participant suggestions

Table 4: Resources recommended by project participants

RESOURCE	AUTHOR	DESCRIPTION	COMMENT
Duolingo		All kinds of activities	Online app to learn a new language and practice the four skills (speaking, listening, writing and reading). Also available for mobile devices.
Ed.ted.com		Videos	TED's youth and education initiative, for sparking students curiosity and enhancing presentation literacy skills
EFL Classroom 2.0	David Deubelbeiss	Many classroom resources (videos, exercises, lesson plans), all ages/proficiency levels	Many free resources, some parts private (one-time fee)
En français	Alix Creuzé	Curated site for French	

RESOURCE	AUTHOR	DESCRIPTION	COMMENT
French Teacher Net	Steve Smith	Resources for French	Some free, subscription needed for others
Learning English	BBC	Ressources for learning English	Many free resources (audio, video and text materials) for all learners of English around the world, from full courses to individual use materials
Sparknotes		Book summaries, videos and quizzes	well-documented platform for English litterature and authors, help you understand books, write papers and study for tests
TESOL teaching and learning websites	Phil Chappell	Portal with wide variety of EFL/ESL resources	
The Learning Network	NY Times	Activities for students	Classroom ressources (lesson plans, writing prompts, quizzes, etc.) all based on articles, essays, images, videos published on the NYTimes.com
TICE et langues	Jurgen Wagner	Curated site for French	
Video Thema DW		Videos for German FL	

Don't forget: play fair

Teachers working with digital resources should remember to **play fair**, meaning

- checking licenses for online resources including images;

- giving credit for any resources used; and

- showing learners how to do this.

As noted, open educational resources offer excellent opportunities in this respect, and the LangOER project's handbook Going Open (also referenced in the final section of this guide) has useful information about open licensing.

It is also important to play safe. Check the ITILT **Digital Tools** mini-guide for more on protecting your learners in online environments.

Chapter 4
Going further
links and references for digital resources

The final section of this Digital Resources mini-guide has links to open education resources and references for the research cited for those ready to go further in this area.

Open resources

Table 5: Open educational resources

TITLE	DESCRIPTION
Open Educational Resources - the basics	2-page document with introduction to OER, including links to resources and tools for open education, especially repositories for language education
Going open with LangOER	information, ideas and activities for open practices in language education, particularly information about licensing, reusing, redistributing and remixing resources
Availability of FL materials in OER repositories	repositories for language education resources
Paris declaration	Statement of objectives of open education

References

Cook, V. (1998). Relating SLA Research to Language Teaching Materials. *Canadian Modern Language Review, 1 (2)*: 9-27.

Commonwealth of Learning (2017). Open Educational Resources: From Commitment to Action. Burnaby: COL.

Ellis, R. (2005). Principles of Instructed Language Learning. *System*, 33: 209-224.

Lightbown, P. (2000). Anniversary Article: Classroom SLA Research and Second Language Teaching. *Applied Linguistics, 21*: 431-462.

Myles, F. (2002). *Second Language Acquisition Research: Its Significance for Learning and Teaching Issues*. Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies Guide to Good Practice. http://www.llas.ac.uk/resources/gpg/421

Whyte, S. (2014). Digital pencil sharpening: technology integration and language learning autonomy. EL.LE, 3(1): 31-53. Università Ca' Foscari, Venezia. [PDF]

Abbreviations

ABBREVIATION	MEANING
L1	first or native language
L2	second or foreign language, target language
OER	open educational resources
SLA	second language acquisition
TBLT	task-based language teaching

Interactive Teaching in Languages with Technology

itilt2.eu

August 2017

Author

Shona Whyte

Project partners

Cardiff Metropolitan University (coordinator)

Hacettepe Üniversitesi

Linguapolis Antwerp University

Pädagogische Hochschule Schwäbisch Gmünd

TELLConsult

Université Nice Sophia Antipolis

Photo credits

Cover photo: Tim Gouw

Attribution-NonCommercial