Project 3: English Learning websites

Followings are my rank of the CALL workshop list:
(1) BBC Learning English
http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/index.shtml
(2) British Council
(3) ESL Cyber Learning Lab
http://www.esl-lab.com/
(4) EnglishLearner.com
(5) Activities for ESL Students
http://a4esl.org/
(6) WERTi
http://prospero.ling.ohio-state.edu/WERTi/index.py/main
(7) Virtual Language Centre
http://vlc.polyu.edu.hk/default.htm
(8) British National Corpus
http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/
(9) Compleat Lexical Tutor
www.lextutor.ca
(10) The AWL Gapmaker
http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/~alzsh3/acvocab/awlgapmaker.htm
(11) Corpus Concordance Sampler
http://www.collins.co.uk/Corpus/CorpusSearch.aspx
(12) VISL Grammar Games
http://visl.sdu.dk/games_gym.html
(13) ESL Programs’ Learning site
http://www.digitalunion.osu.edu/eslbloch/index.html

My favorite one is BBC learning English. It is an official website, including lots of function. In “words in the news”, it will give you a short report and the summary of it. Besides, it also shows you the English explanation of the vocabulary in this report. To my pleasure, it has “listen” function. Due to this function, I can not only improve my reading skill but also the listening skill. Before reading the report, I can click to listen it first, then reading it to find out what I’ve listened. I think the greatest virtue of BBC English
Learning is it’s matters for teaching which are related our daily life. We can learn English through reading internationally important news, the recipes or something like that. And this web also offer “worksheets” for students to practice by themselves. We just have to click into “For teachers”, and it will show us every topic’s worksheets, including vocabulary, gapped transcript, jumbled sentences, and so on. When we finish the worksheets, we can check out by looking the correct answer under it. If you think it is not enough for your English studying at home, this web have “quizzes”: quizent (6 questions for each topic), crossword, beat the keeper and other quizzes. These quizzes are updated frequently too, and most of them are related to the articles on the websites. So if you don’t read the articles first, it might be difficult to take the quiz.

In addition to BBC Learning English, British Council is another choice. Like the BBC web, this web is also an official web. It provides English learning for everyone (especially for teenagers and adults). In this web, we can practice our English through themes. From sport to culture to science to history, as well as 150 general themes, we can chose whatever we like. Take “culture” for example, it has many subtitle like current item, living in the UK, food, holidays, arts, music, etc. In each subtitle, it also has smaller topic like healthy eating, curry lovers, and a food revolution, selecting your favorite one and read the article. Furthermore, this web can “test your level” (including vocabulary, reading, listening and grammar). But the drawback of it is: on each article it doesn’t line the vocabulary under it and
it can’t listen the article too.

ESL Cyber Learning Lab is a good place for listen learning. You can depend on your ability, then choose easy, medium or difficult to have a listening test. It’s a good way to test your listening. EnglishLearner.com offers online English tests at all levels (grammar, vocabulary, reading, crosswords). Activities for ESL Students is also a website for tests, and it not only has English quizzes (grammar, vocabulary, etc) but has bilingual quizzes. WERTi has two workbooks, one is about prepositions and the other is about determiners. In this two workbook, you can search in Reuters news to obtain a text on a topic you want to work with. For instance, you type “earthquake” and press Reuters news search, then it will find some news related to “earthquake”. After that, select one news. If you click “color”, the prepositions of this news will be colored. On the other hand, you choose fill-in-the-blanks, the preposition of the news will become a blank, and you have to fill in. Virtual Language Centre has two main function: game and dictionary. We can play crossword puzzle in this website and can use the “net dictionary” to find the English meaning of a word. British National Corpus is like Sketch engine, however after search the corpus. The result will not emphasize the word you type. Compleat Lexical Tutor is a comprehensive website. It has grammar test, corpus builder. Besides of learning English, it also can let learner practice French. The AWL Gapmaker Will generate a gapfill exercise. First, choose and put an English paragraph into the text box, and select the level you want. Then it will create some gap for you to fill in. Corpus Concordance Sampler is smaller than British National Corpus. It is composed of 56 million words of contemporary written and spoken text. But differ from BNC, it will emphasize the word you type and put it in the middle of the sentence. VISL Grammar Games is a web which is mainly for languages learner to play and practice language, and it also has corpus function. ESL Programs’ Learning site is designed to help students understand how to use reporting verbs in academic writing.

After browsing these 13 website, I classified all of them into three categories. And followings are my classification:

1. English learning websites mainly for games and quizzes
   http://visl.sdu.dk/games_gym.html
   http://www.leetutor.ca/
   http://www.esl-lab.com/
   http://a4esl.org/
2. English learning websites not only have games and quizzes but have learning materials
http://vlc.polyu.edu.hk/default.htm
http://prospero.ling.ohio-state.edu/WERTi/index.py/main
http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/index.shtml

3. English learning websites only have learning materials without game and quiz
http://www.collins.co.uk/Corpus/CorpusSearch.aspx
http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/
http://www.digitalunion.osu.edu/eslbloch/index.html
http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/~alzsh3/acvocab/awlgapmaker.htm

I think this classification means some of the websites are full of entertainment, and some of them are serious. But I think games and quizzes are elements for a CALL website. Because unlike traditional languages learning, online learning often can’t let students test themselves. Furthermore, CALL learning is easily tend to bore and not interesting. So learning English through playing games is a good method for learner to be interested in it. But if a English learning websites only have games and quizzes, it’s hard for learner to improve their English. Therefore, learning materials are also important.

After classifying the 13 websites, I consider English learning websites which are not only have games and quizzes but have learning materials are the most useful for English learning. Like BBC English learning, the games and quizzes are related to the learning materials. It will help learners deeply memorize what they have learned, in other words, learners can review what they’ve learn by entertainment.

And for each category, I choose one example from the list and find one other website.

(1)English learning websites mainly for games and quizzes
  • The example from the list: Virtual Language Centre
    http://visl.sdu.dk/games_gym.html
  • By myself: 2FlashGames.com
    http://www.2flashgames.com/learning_english_games.htm
In 2FlashGames.com, it has many kinds of games. And one kind of it is “learning English games”. Compared with Virtual Language Centre, the game is more attractive to English learners. For example, one form of the game is memory. It will give you a picture which is composed of 30 cards, and you have to flip the cards over and memorize the. While Virtual Language Centre’s games are a little boring, the colour and the picture of the games are simple. Although Virtual Language Centre has much more games than the 2FlashGames.com, every time I try to play the games on it. It spends me lots of time on waiting for downloading, and it will even lag when I am playing. However, 2FlashGames.com also has its short points, the games for English learning are few. And most of them are too easy, it is fit for beginner but not for intermediate. Besides, 2FlashGames.com only has English version games, Virtual Language Centre is a great websites for bilingual languages learners.

(2) English learning websites not only have games and quizzes but have learning materials
• The example from the list: BBC Learning English
In Study Zone, you can first select your English language level. Including beginner, lower intermediate, intermediate, upper intermediate and advanced. The classification of level is complete and perfect, unlike many English learning websites only divide learner into three levels. In this websites, you can choose your level first, then take the class. And the other great thing is: beside each article it has exercise. You can do the multiple-choice questions after reading the article, but you have to notice the “Remaining time for this quiz”. If you think this is not enough, you can take the grammar exercise of this article too. But the drawbacks of it are: it doesn’t update the learning materials every day. Compared with this websites, BBC English Learning is a better learning website. Not only because it renew its articles and quizzes daily but also because it can listen the
articles. In addition, BBC Learning English web also give learner worksheets which are updated frequently.

(3) English learning websites only have learning materials without game and quiz

- The example from the list: British National Corpus
  http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/
- By myself: Sketch engine
  http://beta.sketchengine.co.uk/auth/

These two websites are both mainly about corpus searching. But the information of Sketch engine is much bigger than BNC, the functions of it are more perfect than BNC. And the corpora of Sketch Engine have not only English corpus, it also has French, German, Chinese, etc. So I think Sketch Engine is better than British National Corpus.

As far as I am concerned, I think a well designed CALL website should be like BBC English Learning. Some virtue of this website I’ve mentioned previously, so I don’t describe it again. But the well designed should be “two-way” learning, just like the BBC English Learning web. In “teacher’s homework”, students can send our answer to their, and the teachers will choose their favorite sentences and put them on the Internet. However, students have to be brave enough to send their answers. Previously, I have done some “teacher’s homework”, but I am too shy to send it. Nowadays, I usually will send my sentence to the teacher, because I find that there is nothing to be shy. Even though I have many mistakes, it’s still all right.
CALL is a free form English Learning, and no one will ask you for your homework. It’s an independent learning. You have to press yourself on taking the class, or you might learn nothing. So motivation is the most important thing that you should have. If you don’t have great motivation, you can find other way to remind you, like set the English learning website as homepage. In this case, whenever you open the Internet, the homepage will remind you to learn English.

Unlike traditional English Learning, through CALL, we don’t have to spend certain time to sit in the classroom. Besides we can use our leisure time to learn English. On the other hand, we have to spend lots of money to go to cram school. But CALL offer us a cheap way or no cost way to learn English.

I think students would prefer this kind of English studying, especially for college students. In college, we seldom spend time on learning English. Even we want to learn English, we still don’t know which textbook should we read. In the junior and senior high school, teachers always decide what we have to read. But in the college, no one will ask us to study English seriously anymore. Many of my friends said their English ability were dropping vertically.

But is this learning form fit for other age groups? I don’t think so. Take workers for instance, every day when they go home. They are tired and want to relax. Will they force themselves sit in front of computer and learn English? Not to mention if they have children. If they have children, they are bound to interact with them. Therefore, I think CALL will not be fit for most adults. The effective way for them to study English is the traditional English learning. Not only they pay the money to the cram school, are asked to sit in the classroom, do the homework and have the test will they improve their English properly. However, if the adults retired and their children already grow up. Maybe it is possible for them to study through CALL.