



## FEATURED THEME: ONLINE TRANSLATORS

### Making the most of online translators in foreign language classes

by Charlene Polio

*“Tuesdays that do with Morrie, the book irascibly read that a book be.”*

*—from an ESL student’s essay*

The above sentence illustrates a humorous and incomprehensible outcome of using an online translator. Despite the ungrammaticality of many translated sentences, students will continue to succumb to the temptation of using translators, and banning them from language classes is probably futile. Instead, mistranslations can serve as beneficial teaching opportunities. Several years ago, my then ninth grade daughter asked me to check her French essay. I laughed when I read the sentence, *J’aime courir transnational*. I explained what happened when she entered *I like to run cross-country* into the translator. We then checked two other online translators. The first produced, not surprisingly, *J’aime courir le pays en travers*, but the second result caused me to pause and try to recall my rusty French. The sentence was *J’aime diriger le pays fâché*, which means *I like to manage (run) the angry (cross) country*. I will now always remember the words for *to manage* and *angry*. Bringing humorous results to the attention of your students as they arise should certainly make students wary of translators, while also serving as grammar and vocabulary mini-lessons, particularly to help them understand parts of speech and the lack of one-to-one correspondence across languages. Nevertheless, a series of systematic lessons can be even more beneficial. After an introductory lesson on the dangers of translators, lessons on how to use translators to check grammar and vocabulary can be conducted, as well as lessons on using translators to revise essays and to investigate pragmatics.

The first lesson on the danger of translators can include providing students with an authentic target language text translated into English. For example, an article from a French-language Montreal newspaper about an eighty-year-old Montreal Canadiens fan resulted in this nearly incomprehensible translation.

*Jeanne-in Arc Larocque does not measure five feet. It has the appearance of the old injuries at which merge brittleness and delicacy. The fact remains that it is it, most solid and most faithful of the partisans of the Canadian. And due: at 80 years, it supplements its 55e season as subscribed. And it impatiently waits to see its team*

*(Continued on page 4)*

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## EDITOR'S MESSAGE

Dear Readers,

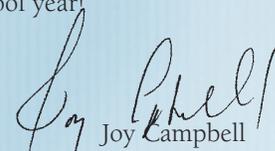
Greetings from the campus of Michigan State University, where classes are back in session and fall is just around the corner. We've had a busy summer here at CLEAR, with our largest series of workshops in many years and the launch of several new products. You can learn more about the newest tools in our line of Rich Internet Applications and about our new Introductory Business German CD-ROM in the announcements on page 3.

In addition, Charlene Polio takes a fresh perspective on online translators for this issue's main article. Often maligned by teachers as inaccurate "shortcuts" for students, online translators can nonetheless be used as effective teaching tools in the foreign language classroom. Dr. Polio's article gives numerous examples of classroom activities – as well as a few humorous excerpts that show how online translators can still get things very wrong!

We continue to visit regional and national conferences to give sessions and run exhibits about CLEAR's free and low-cost products for language teachers. We hope to meet some of you at ACTFL in Orlando this November. Come

visit us at Booth #723 in the LRC Pavilion to say hello and learn more about CLEAR and our products in person. You can also always visit our website for the latest information about CLEAR and our projects: <http://clear.msu.edu>.

As you head into another year of language teaching, never doubt that what you do makes a difference. In celebration of 2008 as the United Nations International Year of Languages, Koichiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, recently wrote, "The Organization is fully aware of the crucial importance of languages when seen against the many challenges that humanity will have to face over the next few decades. Languages are indeed essential to the identity of groups and individuals and to their peaceful coexistence. They constitute a strategic factor of progress towards sustainable development and a harmonious relationship between the global and the local context." I wish you all a fruitful and productive school year!



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### SUGGESTIONS WANTED!

We strive to publish *CLEAR News* articles that represent current topics in foreign language teaching, and we want to hear from you! If you have an idea for an article or would like to see a particular subject addressed, please let us know at [clear@msu.edu](mailto:clear@msu.edu). We will consider your idea for future issues of the newsletter.

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The U.S. Department of Education awards grants through Title VI funding to a small number of institutions for the purpose of establishing, strengthening, and operating language resource and training centers to improve the teaching and learning of foreign languages. There are currently fifteen Language Resource Centers nationwide: the Center for Advanced Language Proficiency Education and Research (CALPER) at The Pennsylvania State University; the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota; the Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS) at the University of Oregon; the Center for Languages of the Central Asian Region (CeLCAR) at Indiana University; the Center for Educational Resources in Culture, Language and Literacy (CERCLL) at the University of Arizona; the Center for Language Education and Research (CLEAR) at Michigan State University; the Language Acquisition Resource

Center (LARC) at San Diego State University; the National African Language Resource Center (NALRC) at the University of Wisconsin—Madison; the National Capital Language Resource Center (NCLRC), a consortium of Georgetown University, the Center for Applied Linguistics, and George Washington University; the National East Asian Languages National Resource Center (NEALRC) at The Ohio State University; the National Foreign Language Resource Center (NFLRC) at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa; the National K-12 Foreign Language Resource Center (NK-12LRC) at Iowa State University; the National Heritage Language Resource Center (NHLRC), a consortium of UCLA and the UC Consortium for Language Learning and Teaching; the National Middle East Language Resource Center (NMELRC) at Brigham Young University; and the South Asia Language Resource Center (SALRC) at The University of Chicago.

## Upcoming Conferences

CLEAR will be represented at exhibit booths at the following conferences this fall and next spring. Stop by to introduce yourself and let us show you what we can offer for your language classroom.

We will be presenting sessions and/or workshops at all of these conferences as well!

- [Michigan World Language Association \(MiWLA\)](#), October 23-24, 2008, Lansing, MI
- [American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages \(ACTFL\)](#), November 21-23, 2008, Orlando, FL
- [Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium \(CALICO\)](#), March 11-14 2009, Tempe, AZ
- [Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages \(CSCTFL\)](#), March 19-21, 2009, Chicago, IL
- [World Languages Day](#), April 18, 2009, East Lansing, MI

## Rich Internet Applications

One of our major initiatives in this funding cycle is a project entitled Rich Internet Applications. The ongoing RIA initiative includes several free online tools for language teachers, and includes the applications listed below. We will be demonstrating these programs at many of the conferences above – attend a session or visit the exhibit hall to learn more!

### NEW! Worksheets

- Create worksheets that go beyond the capabilities of paper-based worksheets
- Add multimedia interactive elements such as drag and drop matching, instant feedback, and audio recording

### NEW! Broadcasts

- Easily create your own podcasts for language learning
- Record and publish from your web browser

### Audio Dropboxes

- Virtual dropbox for audio recordings
- Put a dropbox for speaking assignments on any web page
- Students record themselves and their audio files are automatically put into your dropbox

### Conversations

- Record prompts or questions for your students to answer
- Simulate conversations, role plays, or “virtual interviews”
- Students work in practice mode or respond to questions spontaneously

### Viewpoint

- Make your own videos or upload others’ to use in your teaching
- Easily add and edit subtitles for your videos

- Embed the code easily into your own web page, blog, or mashup

### Mashups

- Combine video clips with interactive online exercises to create tasks for your students
- Students can also create their own activities to share with the class
- Easily leverage Viewpoint, YouTube, Odeo, and SMILE to make new language learning activities

## New Products

Visit <http://clear.msu.edu/clear/store/> for these and other products from CLEAR.

### Introductory Business German

Introductory Business German provides a condensed, highly focused set of activities intended for use by business professionals who conduct business with Germans and German companies and wish to learn more about the German business and economics environment. The program provides a set of information and activities specific to the business environment in a convenient, self-instructional format that allows users to progress at their own pace and at their chosen level of difficulty. The cross-platform multimedia program provides an array of interactive activities to support the acquisition of:

- Essential “survival skills” in the German language.
- Basic information important to understanding German business and economics.
- Intercultural communication information to promote successful communication in the German business environment.

### *La phonétique française*

Similar to our popular Spanish CD-ROM, *Pronunciación y fonética*, this cross-platform multimedia program consists of interactive lessons that can be used by French teachers to learn how to teach pronunciation, or by advanced students working on their own. *La phonétique française* is available now in beta format. Anyone who orders the beta version will automatically receive a free updated version of the CD-ROM if any changes are made upon further piloting.

### Coming Soon

We plan to launch at least two new Rich Internet Applications soon. Check our website for details on these and other new materials. The newest RIA, called *Revisions*, streamlines the writing process. More than an online word processor, students compose and revise their work, and teachers mark up the essays with their own custom tags. The application will be ready in October.

gaining her 19th Stanley cut. “Fifteen years without cut, it is a record. I never passed time without seeing as many the cut. And I start to be in a hurry. Enough that I wonder whether I will recognize it when it will return to Montreal...” Way of speaking: the cut, it knows it by heart. Since its beginnings like spectator, in 1952—the same year as Jean Béliveau the—, Canadian gained with 18 recoveries, including 13 times under its eyes, with the old Forum. Unequalled statistics in the North-American professional sport—if not by the Yankees of New York, with baseball—, who virtually make of Mrs. Larocque the most titrated partisans of hockey in America.

Advanced students can read the English first and then try to reconstruct the original French whereas lower level students can be given a structured activity on the translation with questions about specific phrases. (e.g., Why is the woman referred to as *it*? How do you think you say *Stanley Cup* in French?) Follow-up activities can include holding a contest to see which student can come up with the funniest mistranslation of a text from the target language to English, or having students compare the translations of three different online translators from English to the target language.

A lesson on using translators to check grammar questions can be done with several examples from the target language. For example, a student may want to look up which preposition goes with the verb *décider* in French. Typing in the sentence *I decided to leave at five o'clock* one gets *J'ai décidé de partir à cinq heures*. Similarly, the students can investigate various verb forms or noun genders. Finding the correct answer, or course, presupposes that the translator is giving appropriate translations. If students are taught to enter simple sentences into the translator, however, they should be able to find the answers to their grammar questions.

Using translators for vocabulary lessons can illustrate to students the lack of one-to-one correspondence across languages. For example, the word *break* in English can take an agent as a subject and a theme/patient as an object as in example 1a below. In 1b, however, the subject becomes the theme/patient and the agent is unspecified. Such sentences may cause difficulty for learners of French to translate. Furthermore, some of the uses of *break* are figurative and may not translate directly to other languages, particularly example 1f.

- 1a) *John broke the cup.*
- 1b) *The cup broke.*
- 1c) *John broke his leg.*
- 1d) *John broke his promise.*
- 1e) *John broke a record.*
- 1f) *John broke Ellen's heart.*

When the above sentences were entered into one online translator, the results were as follows.

- 2a) *John a cassé la tasse.*
- 2b) *La tasse s'est cassée.*
- 2c) *John a cassé sa jambe.*
- 2d) *John a cassé sa promesse.*
- 2e) *John a cassé un disque.*
- 2f) *John a brisé le coeur d'Ellen.*

The French results are interesting because sentence 2b is grammatical whereas 2c is not. In 2c, the verb should be reflexive, as in 2b; 2c is appropriately translated as *John s'est cassé la jambe*. As is, 2c means that John tried to break his leg on purpose, perhaps by smashing it with something. These sentences illustrate the use of the reflexive and accompanying change in the auxiliary verb. Furthermore, they emphasize that sometimes translators are correct and sometimes they are not and that students need to be able to evaluate the results. Regarding figurative language, the translator was only partially successful. Sentence 2d is not correct but 2f is. Sentence 2e, not surprisingly, means that John broke a vinyl record.

Students can also be taught to use translators to check sentences in their essays by completing an annotated paragraph assignment. The students write a paragraph in the target language and annotate the essay with their questions, as I have done in my French example (see Figure 1). For example, I was uncertain about some words and genders as well as the use of the subjunctive and imperfect. Students then type English sentences that reflect what they are trying to say into the translator and then copy the results and annotate them. In some cases in my example, I was fairly certain about the translator's result, but in others, I still had questions. Students can revise the essay and annotate their revision commenting on points that they would like the teacher to check.

Finally, online translations can be used to teach pragmatics. We all know of cases where literal translations result in subtle differences, at best, or rudeness, at worst. By showing examples of English sentences that are similar in meaning but slightly different in politeness, the teacher can focus on a variety of pragmatic issues. Below are seven English sentences that can be used to ask someone to borrow money, a pragmatically tricky endeavor. Each sentence will accomplish the task, but some are more polite than others.

- 3a) *Can I borrow some money?*
- 3b) *Could I borrow some money?*
- 3c) *May I borrow some money?*
- 3d) *Can you lend me some money?*
- 3e) *Could you lend me some money?*
- 3f) *Will you lend me some money?*
- 3g) *Would you lend me some money?*

Putting the sentences into a translator resulted in the following Spanish sentences.

- 4a) *¿Puedo pedir prestado un poco de dinero?*
- 4b) *¿Podría pedir prestado un poco de dinero?*
- 4c) *¿Puedo pedir prestado un poco de dinero?*
- 4d) *¿Puede usted prestarme un poco de dinero?*
- 4e) *¿Podría usted prestarme un poco de dinero?*
- 4f) *¿Usted me prestará un poco de dinero?*
- 4g) *¿Usted me prestaría un poco de dinero?*

First, note that the translator had difficulty with the word *some* and mistranslated it as *a little* (*un poco*) in all cases. Sentences 4a, 4b, and 4c are grammatical sentences but are not natural and seem to ask about the speaker's ability to borrow money from a bank. Sentence 4d, 4e and 4g are better, although the pronoun *usted* can be omitted. 4f was translated using the verb *will* to indicate a request for something to be done in the future (e.g., *Will you lend me the money that we discussed tomorrow?*) instead of interpreting it as a way to soften a request. The translator also translated 3a and 3c into the same Spanish sentence when in fact they are subtly different in English.

In sum, we can approach translators as tools to provide teachable moments and not something that students should be told to avoid entirely. Demonstrating some of the pitfalls of online translators can show students how such tools can be misused, and also increase their appreciation of the human element necessary in doing translation work. Students will still need strong language skills to be able to use these online tools appropriately, so they should be viewed as starting points for some innovative techniques to language teaching and learning. You can hope that 'it will all work out in the end' – or, as an online translator suggested, *il tout s'entraînera à la fin*.\*

\*He all will exercise himself at the end.

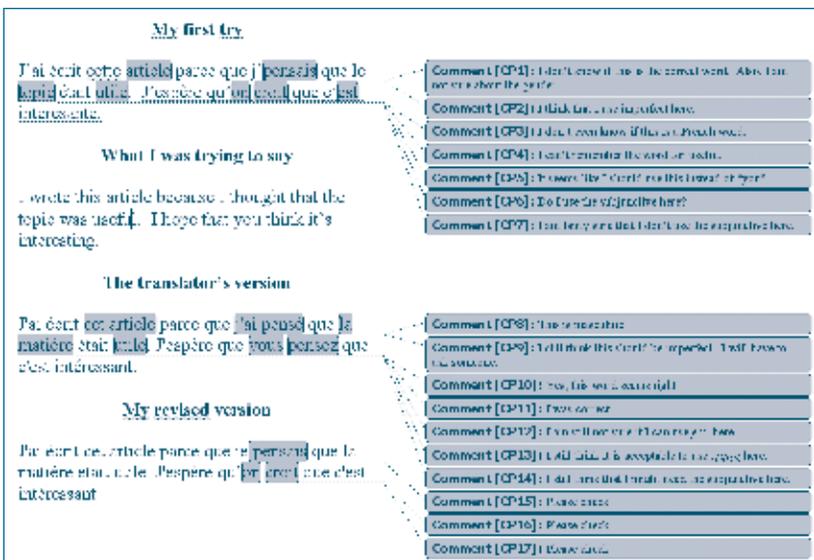


Figure 1

Charlene Polio is an Associate Professor in the Department of Linguistics & Languages and Director of the MA Program in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) at Michigan State University.

# Summer Workshop Overview

For the twelfth consecutive year, CLEAR hosted workshops this summer, drawing participants from all over the United States – and several other countries! Teachers of over ten different languages, from French, Spanish and German to Kiswahili, Polish and Chinese, gathered in East Lansing to gain hands-on experience in a variety of topics. Read on for reports from various participants...

## Making the Most of Video in the Foreign Language Classroom

Eve Zyzik, an Assistant Professor in MSU's Department of Spanish and Portuguese, led this encore workshop for the second consecutive summer. Teachers and researchers agree that video materials can enhance the learning environment in foreign language classrooms by providing rich, contextualized input. Participants in this workshop learned several ways to use video that extend beyond typical listening comprehension activities, as well as techniques for adapting authentic materials to learners of various proficiency levels.

Workshop attendees learned not only techniques for using video, but also the pedagogical theory behind the use of video. One participant commented, "[The best thing about this workshops was that] it covered step-by-step the process of creating a video activity with all the research background and resources related to it." Another enthused, "I plan on developing a whole course around video!"

You can use CLEAR's free online tool, Viewpoint, to upload video clips for use in the classroom. Surpassing the functionality of YouTube, Viewpoint lets you add subtitles to your videos. Learn more at: <http://clear.msu.edu/viewpoint/>.

## Tech Up Your Classroom: Enhancing Your Foreign Language Classroom with Technology

Technology can help make the language classroom more efficient, more authentic, more learner-centered, and it addresses different learning styles. In this workshop, Senta Goertler of MSU's Department of Linguistics and Languages led participants through several ways to "teching up" their classrooms through the use of chats, message boards, blogs, wikis, videos, web quests, course management systems, Microsoft Office software, the Internet in general, and various free CLEAR products. Participants experienced activities from the learner's perspective and developed and shared their own activities.

Participants were happy with this "entry level" technology workshop. As one said, "Thank you for an excellent, engaging, and energizing workshop. I feel excited about getting going and adding new tools to my 'teacher toolbox' for technology!" The group also appreciated the hands-on nature of the sessions: "The fact that we had some individual time to experiment and ask questions was very helpful," "I really enjoyed the opportunity to do activities and try things instead of seeing and hearing about them only."

## Next-Generation Tools for Language Teaching: Rich Internet Applications for the Classroom

Participants in this workshop worked with CLEAR presenters Dennie Hoopingarner and Vineet Bansal to learn more about CLEAR's Rich Internet Applications (RIA) – which Dennie and Vineet wrote and programmed! Having the programmers lead the session allowed participants in our largest workshop to have every question answered by the experts – "You were so willing (and patient) to answer every question. I like the way you two were always there when we were practicing to answer questions about using the tools or equipment. You never made me feel embarrassed about asking for help."

The group learned how to use CLEAR's free new tools for creating interactive web-based multimedia without having to program, download, or upload anything. This set of tools can be used with any language, any textbook, and any level. Among other things, participants learned how to: make web pages where their students can record audio files that are automatically uploaded to a virtual dropbox; make a "mashup" that combines text, pictures, video, and interactive language exercises into one web page; and create virtual conversations for students where they listen to questions and the program captures their responses automatically. As one participant noted, "I think I am only beginning to imagine the uses of all the tools in RIA. This will allow me to work with my students

**“Such enthusiasm is contagious! A wonderful presentation—great fun and amazing learning!”**

in all skill areas. Truly, the breadth and depth of these new tools is amazing!”

You can read more about the various RIA tools (and we’ve launched two new ones since this summer!) in our announcements on page 3. Next summer, in response to requests from participants, we will do an encore of this workshop split into beginner and advanced levels.

### Designing Online Language Teaching Materials with an Accompanying Online Assessment Portfolio

Our fourth workshop this summer was taught by Paula Winke of MSU’s Second Language Studies program. Combining technology and assessment, this workshop provided participants with the skills to create online assessment activities for reading, writing, listening and speaking. Special emphasis was placed on aligning these materials with an online assessment portfolio that can be used with students for formative and self-assessment. Participants appreciated the “wonderful, practical application” and the fact that among the tools presented, a number of them were free ones that dovetailed with CLEAR’s RIA workshop.

Participants left the workshop having created a set of online tasks for language learning (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and one online portfolio plan with rubrics drafted. Many already had plans for using the tools in the upcoming academic year: “I will put links to the materials I create in by Blackboard site. It integrates perfectly (I tried it this afternoon). The CLEAR applications broaden the Blackboard applications immensely.”

### Incorporating Communicative Speaking Activities into the Teaching of Reading, Writing, Grammar, and Vocabulary

In a change from the technology-focused workshops earlier in the summer, participants in this session focused on

communicative speaking activities. Charlene Polio of MSU’s Department of Linguistics and Languages led this workshop and demonstrated numerous ways to incorporate speaking activities into the teaching of reading and writing, as well as showing participants how to target specific grammar and vocabulary so that they can better supplement their textbooks with communicative speaking tasks. Participants enjoyed the variety of methods presented: “The best thing about this workshop was the multitude of activities and methods taught! So much was immediately applicable and I like how we learned to use the strategies at various levels.”

As in other workshops, participants also appreciated the hands-on nature of the sessions. As one pointed out, “It was nice that we got a chance to act [the activities] out. That helped me tell if they were useful for my student groups.” Other attendees will look at their current lessons from a new perspective: “I will try to rethink existing activities in a more communicative way.” Some teachers also saw the application of technology tools from other workshops, reporting, “I will be able to use the activities alongside of the CLEAR RIA tools,” and “RIA tools would support these activities as homework.”

### Language Program Development

The final workshop of a busy summer was on language program development. Co-presenters Senta Goertler and Angelika Kraemer of MSU’s Linguistics and Languages department worked with a small group to walk them through theoretical and practical issues in program development, program maintenance, program articulation, and program recruitment. Participants enjoyed the “collaborative nature of the workshop,” and appreciated that it was “well structured and well organized.” It was also practical, presenting ideas for needs assessment, funding request letters, marketing materials, and more. Participants felt that the workshop contained “a lot of very useful information and practical tips.”

Participants had an opportunity to observe the German Summer Camp at Michigan State University, though the topics in the workshop could be applied to all languages and the group brainstormed ideas for all type of programs. The theoretical background was also appreciated: “Everything was research-based and data-driven. It gave us a ‘process,’ not a canned program.” Every participant reported that they would be “very likely” to use the skills and materials presented in the workshop.



# CLEAR News

*CLEAR News is a publication of the Center for Language Education and Research and is intended to inform foreign language educators of the Center's on-going research projects and professional development workshops, to report on current foreign language research and publications and their applicability to the classroom, and to provide a forum for educators to discuss foreign language teaching and learning topics.*



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