Interaction is an essential component of language acquisition, but it can be difficult to find ways to increase learners’ opportunities for meaningful target language use and exposure. Technology can help by enabling types of interaction that are difficult to carry out extensively in the classroom, like unplanned or extended language production, and also by facilitating interactions that would not be possible without technology, for example, removing distance barriers by connecting learners with speakers of the target language in ways that promote language acquisition.

Several of the many innovative technology tools presented at the LaunchPad, an event sponsored by ACTFL and the Language Flagship Technology Innovation Center (Tech Center) during the 2018 ACTFL Convention, support interaction in both of these critical ways.

Extempore
The first of these tools that I recommend you try is Extempore (extemporeapp.com), an app that captures students’ spoken response to a teacher prompt. It supports the teacher-design of unique learning experiences through the manipulation of key parameters. For example, Extempore allows you to control:

- preparation time before responding to a prompt
- the amount of time allowed for a particular response
- the number of attempts allowed before a final response is submitted, and
- the type of media used to record language production (audio or video).

By manipulating these parameters, you can create tasks that elicit extemporaneous speech. For example, if preparation time is 0 seconds and only one attempt is allowed, the learner has only one chance to respond to the prompt immediately after it is viewed. This is one of the best features of the app, since it enables a type of interaction that can be difficult to practice with every single student in class. By creating opportunities to elicit extemporaneous speech, Extempore can help replicate a myriad of real-life situations that push learners to make use of recently acquired linguistic resources or those that are just being incorporated into their linguistic repertoire.

By creating opportunities to elicit extemporaneous speech, Extempore can help replicate a myriad of real-life situations that push learners to make use of recently acquired linguistic resources or those that are just being incorporated into their linguistic repertoire.

Correspondingly, moving the dial of parameters in the other direction can radically change the experience and help create extended opportunities for language production. For example, increasing preparation time and the number of attempts allowed before submission may not only increase actual language output but could also help lower anxiety and build confidence.

Besides the amount of input, another parameter that can be tweaked in relation to language production is the type of input in relation to modality. The prompt to elicit language can be text, an image, audio, or video. Likewise, learner output can also be preset to audio or video.

A valid concern of many teachers when considering the integration of new technologies is the amount of time required for setup and learner feedback. The Extempore interface is simple and intuitive. Mechanisms for feedback include a rubric with up to five categories that is easy to set up and use. However, learner feedback and grading can be a concern if the language production expected is not limited in time or by the prompt, both of which can be managed through the design of the task.

The Extempore site offers many examples of activities that allow teachers to explore the full potential of the app. Visit extemporeapp.com/activity-ideas for ideas on how to use Extempore.
However, once you have set up a project with a partner class or school, using Cultura and managing the exchange with a colleague abroad can present technical hurdles. That’s where Class2Class (class2class.com) comes to the rescue. It was built from the ground up to create a virtual space in which two classes can converge and make the exchange as focused and as productive as possible.

This virtual space is supported by a set of tools that enables activities and interactions that are difficult to implement using a regular learning management system, plus several apps. For example, Class2Class incorporates the open tools created by MIT, which are used to design and implement Cultura activities, such as word associations, sentence completions, and reactions to hypothetical situations.

Although an exchange with a partner class can be organized using multiple apps and tools, having a single platform like Class2Class which incorporates the essentials simplifies the process significantly. For those interested in more sophistication, the platform can also be extended by using multiple app integrations.

If you are not familiar with the Cultura model and would like to see concrete examples of language elicited by the exchanges and the types of discussions they prompt, I recommend you visit cultura.mit.edu/cultura-exchanges-archive. To learn about Cultura in general, visit cultura.mit.edu.

The ACTFL/Tech Center LaunchPad

Inspired by the TV show Shark Tank and its predecessor, the Japanese TV show Dragon’s Den, LaunchPad (lftic.lll.hawaii.edu/launchpad) is designed to facilitate early dialogue between innovative language tech startup companies and world language professionals. ACTFL and The Language Flagship Technology Innovation Center (Tech Center) at the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa co-sponsor this exciting competition.

At the inaugural LaunchPad event during the 2017 ACTFL Annual Convention in Nashville, five startup companies presented their technology innovations intended to fill real needs in world language education. A panel of experienced professionals and event attendees provided feedback and decided on a winner based on the pedagogical merits of the product: Class2Class (class2class.com) won.

The second annual LaunchPad event at the 2018 ACTFL Annual Convention in New Orleans also featured five startups which showcased and demonstrated their products at the Tech Center booth during the ACTFL World Languages Expo and competed before the panel of judges on Friday. Banter (f6s.com/banter2) emerged the winner.

Tech Watch showcases numerous LaunchPad startups in this issue. For a complete list and links to all competitors, go to lftic.lll.hawaii.edu/launchpad.

If you are interested in the latest technology innovations for language education, make sure to attend the next LaunchPad at the 2019 ACTFL Annual Convention and World Languages Expo in Washington, DC.

LISTEN UP!
Language-Related Podcasts

We Teach Languages (www.weteachlang.com)

We Teach Languages is a podcast and blog that explores the question, “What does excellent language teaching look like?” from the diverse perspectives of real teachers. New episodes are posted on Fridays. We Teach Languages has no sponsors and charges no fees. It uses free and low-cost tools. What’s more, anyone can contribute interviews with language teachers to We Teach Languages. Volunteer podcast contributors are acknowledged and featured (weteachlang.com/guests) on the site. A blog post by producer and host Stacey Margarita Johnson (tinyurl.com/y9c83p9p) explains how you can become a We Teach Languages podcaster.

Language Latte (kidworldcitizen.org/category/language) Language Latte is a conversation about teaching world languages. Podcasts examine issues that world language teachers face when trying to help students achieve proficiency and are posted on the Kid World Citizen website where there are also age-appropriate activities gathered from around the world by host Becky Morales and organized by topic and by country. Podcast topics range from Global Education and Global Competency to Using Music in Class for Language Learning.
WEBSITES to Watch

Read Alien
readalien.com

ReadAlien is a personalized language learning platform with two primary functions: recognizing a student’s learning experience and facilitating chats in the targeted language. Learners first acquire a foundation by importing their own prose (books, blog posts, new articles, etc.) into the platform. ReadAlien cross-references all words learners have registered as “known” and “not known” and presents them back in an interactive, intuitive reading experience. ReadAlien then uses data and context awareness to manage learners’ eLearning progress. Teachers may audit and prepare content for students in advance; then students can further personalize it to their skill level. A second function is a chat experience in which conversation is real-time assisted and overlaid with definitions from students’ own vocabulary. While in conversation, a teacher can see instantly what words learners are struggling with, grounded in their own vocabulary at a particular point in time.

VEO
www.veo-group.com

VEO is an online video tagging and sharing platform, and an optional live-tagging video recording app. It combines video recorded via any device with time-stamp tagged data. Learners, peers, and teachers capture key moments of speaking skill, jumping directly to these, making video accessible and convenient for learning. Additionally, tags build up quantitative statistics of learner strengths and areas for improvement, providing clear metrics to motivate change, support learner collaboration, and generate cohort profiles. Since video can be livestreamed onto the VEO platform for synchronous tagging at any distance, this platform is able to support large-scale global language learning pilots, creating opportunities for growing learning networks based on observable speaking and listening skills. Additionally, clear tagged video evidence provides an efficient and transparent way to assess language learning at distance.

What’s That App?

Openwords
openwords.com

Openwords is an open source language learning webapp that allows educators to author content or borrow open source curricula designed by colleagues around the world, for use by their students outside of the classroom. The curricula are free and made available as an OER (open educational resource). Various kinds of language learning exercises can be authored, including sentence construction; conjugation; listening and hearing; minimal pairs (phonetics); fill in the blank and multiple choice; and simple vocabulary review. Openwords lessons can be generated in any language.

Banter
www.f6s.com/banter2

Banter leverages geolocation to alert users when there are people around them who have interests or languages in common with them, and then helps them initiate text and face-to-face chat with the people they would like to get to know. In addition to providing the tools needed to have fruitful face-to-face interactions, Banter also provides tips on how to initiate conversations and reminds users of things they have in common. Banter helps improve and expand social networks within defined communities, such as those of universities and large businesses. It is a mobile platform that supports authentic interactions.

Fluent Forever
fluent-forever.com

Fluent Forever is a mobile app designed to teach users how to think in a new language, rather than translate. It accomplishes this by taking users through ear training, simple word acquisition using pictures, and complex vocabulary/grammar acquisition using sentences. Users choose which words they wish to learn, and which combination of sentences, pictures, and flashcard types will best teach them those words. A companion web app allows collaboration.

These and other web resources can be accessed via the Publications area on the ACTFL website at actfl.org/publications/all/the-language-educator/tech-watch

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