

Easy 2: Constructing an interactive language learning environment and applying some language learning theories

University of Tampere
Department of English
Pro Gradu Thesis
Spring 2007
Mikko-Heikki Heinonen

Tampereen yliopisto

Kieli- ja käännöstieteen laitos

Englantilainen filologia

Heinonen, Mikko-Heikki: Easy 2: Constructing an interactive language learning environment and applying some language learning theories

Pro gradu -tutkielma, 80 sivua, 27 liitesivua

Toukokuu 2007

Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on arvioida Euroopan komission rahoittaman Easy 2 -hankkeen tuottamaa, verkossa sijaitsevaa kielenoppimisympäristöä sekä itse projektia kokonaisvaltaisen kielenoppimisen teorian ja Stephen Krashenin kielenomaksumisteorian valossa. Kuuden oppilaitoksen edustajista neljässä eri maassa koostunut projektiryhmä toimi lokakuusta 2002 tammikuuhun 2005, jolloin projektin lopputuote julkaistiin. Tutkimus muodostaa osan koko projektin loppuarviointia.

Easy 2 on Internetissä osoitteessa <http://www.easy2.org> sijaitseva, nuorille ja syrjäytymisvaarassa oleville käyttäjille suunnattu kielenoppimisympäristö, joka pohjautuu avoimen lähdekoodin sisällönhallintaohjelmistoon sekä projektiryhmän tuottamaan oppimismateriaaliin. Ympäristö on tarkoitettu opettamaan alkeita viidestä eurooppalaisesta kielestä: italia, ranska, saksa, suomi ja englantia. Englanti on myös toiminut projektiryhmän välisenä yhteydenpito- ja prototyypikielenä pedagogisen lähestymistavan, harjoitusten ja muun materiaalin valmistelussa.

Projektiryhmä valitsi jo varhaisessa vaiheessa tavoitteeksi kokonaisvaltaisen oppimiskäsityksen, jonka mukaan oppiminen on tehokkainta, kun se sidotaan oppijan omaan kokemukseen. Osana tätä lähestymistapaa ryhmä valitsi myös avoimen dialogin sekä oppimisen autenttisuuden periaatteet, joiden pohjalta pyrittiin luomaan tuomitsematon ympäristö, joka ottaa oppijan huomioon kokonaisena ihmisenä ja jossa oppilaan ja opettajan roolit lähenevät toisiaan uuden asian yhdessä tutkijoina. Stephen Krashenin teorioita vieraan kielen omaksumisesta käytetään arvioimaan ryhmän tuottamaa materiaalia, vaikka projektiryhmä ei niitä eksplisiittisesti valinnut, sillä ne kuvaavat erittäin tarkasti ryhmän valitsemia metodeita kielenopetukseen ja niveltävät kokonaisvaltaisen oppimisen ajattelutapaan.

Tutkimuksen päähavainto on, että lopputuloksena oleva ympäristö toteuttaa melko hyvin asettamiaan periaatteita ja suhtautuu kielenopetukseen varsin systemaattisella ja perusteltavissa olevalla tavalla. Ympäristön suosio on kuitenkin ollut vähäistä ja sitä ovat vaivanneet toistuvat tekniset ongelmat. Vaikuttaa kuitenkin siltä, että ongelmat liittyvät ympäristön julkaisuun, markkinointiin ja tekniseen ylläpitoon enemmän kuin ongelmiin oppimisteorian toteuttamisessa.

Tutkimus pyrkii Easy 2 -projektin arvioinnin lisäksi tarjoamaan tuleville vastaaville hankkeille kokemuspohjaa, jonka perusteella voidaan mahdollisesti välttää projektin kohtaamat ongelmat.

Asiasanat: kielenoppiminen, kokonaisvaltainen oppiminen, tietoa luova projekti

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	5
1.1 Teacher and student manuals.....	6
2. Starting points for the project.....	7
2.1 Project partners.....	7
2.2 Project group working methods.....	8
2.3 Project funding.....	9
2.4 Target group.....	10
2.5 Languages used.....	11
2.6 Technical background.....	11
2.6.1 Usability testing.....	13
2.7 Theoretical starting points.....	14
3. Pedagogical theory: Experiential learning, ELP, Open dialogue and Authenticity.....	15
3.1 Experiential learning in language education.....	15
3.2 Experiential learning in the classroom.....	19
3.3 Applying Experiential Learning.....	19
3.4 European Language Portfolio.....	20
3.4.1 Electronic portfolio.....	21
3.5 Applying the Language Portfolio and Common European Framework.....	21
3.5.1 'Can do' statements.....	22
3.6 Open dialogue.....	25
3.7 Authenticity.....	26
3.8 Applying open dialogue and authenticity.....	26
3.9 Open dialogue and authenticity in the working methods of the project group.....	27
4. Linguistic theory: Stephen Krashen's Monitor Model.....	28
4.1 The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis.....	28
4.2 The Monitor Hypothesis.....	29
4.3 The Natural Order Hypothesis.....	31
4.4 The Input Hypothesis.....	31
4.5 The Affective Filter Hypothesis.....	33
4.6 Applying the Monitor Model.....	34
5. Construction of the environment.....	35
5.1 Overview and definitions.....	35
5.2 Teaching grammar: Development of the ToolBox.....	37
5.2.1 On the development of ToolBoxes.....	38
5.2.2 Multilingual vs. monolingual.....	39
5.2.3 Grammatical vs. communicative.....	41

5.2.4 Verbal vs. visual.....	43
5.3 Activities.....	45
5.3.1 Mission: Easytown.....	47
5.4 Teaching vocabulary: WordBoxes.....	48
5.4.1 Vocabulary learning theory.....	49
5.4.2 From thematical glossary to ”WordBox”	50
5.4.3 Multi-lingual WordBox.....	53
5.5 Texts for reading: Stories.....	56
5.5.1 Content of Stories.....	56
5.5.2 Structure and lay-out.....	57
5.5.3 Recording the texts.....	58
5.5.4 Analysis of texts.....	59
5.6 Communicative tools.....	60
5.6.1 Communicative online features	61
5.6.2 Chat and ShoutBox.....	62
6.Evaluation of environment features.....	65
6.1 Experiential learning principles.....	65
6.2 ToolBoxes.....	66
6.3 Activities.....	67
6.4 WordBoxes.....	69
6.5 Communicative tools.....	70
7.Conclusions.....	74
References	
Appendices	

1. Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to study and evaluate the construction of an Internet-based interactive language learning environment in the framework of a select number of language acquisition theories.

The focus of the study is the project "Easy 2", a European Commission Socrates Lingua 2 funded project which ran from December 2002 until January 2005. I myself was involved in this project as a representative of the University of Tampere, so I had ample opportunity to study the development of the product, and also contribute to the outcome in a number of ways. I was also largely responsible for the technical implementation of the website, since the original representative chosen for this purpose (Pirkanmaa Polytechnic University Computer Sciences) was not available.

The outcome of the project is an Internet site, www.easy2.org, which can be accessed and utilised by anyone with Internet access. The website is based on a free and open-source Content Management System (CMS) known as postNuke and utilises a host of other free-of-charge tools, such as Hot Potatoes and Quandary by Half-Baked Software. The site was publicly launched in Tampere, Finland at the end of January in 2005. At the beginning of 2007, the site had some 600 registered users.

In my study, I will mainly concentrate on the development process of the material, related pedagogical and linguistic theory, and the analysis of how the final material reflects the starting points and/or theoretical principles chosen. As this thesis forms part of the final evaluation and documentation of the project, I will also draw conclusions on the overall success of the project.

1.1 Teacher and student manuals

In addition to managing the technical framework, the main portion of my contribution to the project was both to observe the workings of the project group, to evaluate the results based on the theoretical and practical starting points chosen, and to prepare the user manuals for the website for both the students and teachers. The student manual (Appendix 1) contains practical information for new students registering into the environment, and an introduction into using the different site features. It is aimed at the initial target group (teenagers) and written in English.

The teacher manual (Appendix 2) briefly accounts for the pedagogical principles involved in the creation of the site - at launch time - and presents the connections to the European Language Portfolio. It also includes a total of four ready-made lessons for the usage of the environment: an introductory lesson, a standard lesson, an initial communicative lesson and an intercultural communicative lesson. The latter communicative lesson is intended to support the use of the environment for allowing learners from different countries to interact. These manuals are available on the website as PDF files and they were also distributed in printed form during the launch of the project.

2. Starting points for the project

2.1 Project partners

The Easy2 project started in late 2002, with the Italian partner CNOS-FAP acting as coordinator and their representative Francesco Majorana as the promotor of the project. The group consisted of four partner countries and the following institutions:

- CNOS-FAP, Sicily, Italy
- Centre de Formation des Apprentices, Perpignan, France
- Bildungsmarkt b.v., Berlin, Germany
- Pirkanmaa College, Tampere, Finland
- Pirkanmaa Polytechnic, Tampere, Finland
- University of Tampere, Tampere, Finland

It is noteworthy that four of the partners come from the vocational institute level. Pirkanmaa Polytechnic was involved largely because of the participation of Ms. Rea Tuominen in the project. The University of Tampere, on the other hand, was assigned as the evaluator and provider of pedagogical expertise in the project. This was how I became involved in the project; my initial task was to prepare evaluation criteria for the end product and write my pro gradu thesis based on that experience.

However, as I officially joined the project group in March 2003, it became apparent that my other skills would be needed as well. The project, at that time, had made no decisions on the technical framework to be used, and I was able to contribute with my IT experience to the selection

process. The responsibility for technical implementation was planned to rest on Pirkanmaa Polytechnic, but for resource reasons, they were unable to participate. In the ensuing months, I quickly became largely responsible for the technical aspects of the creation of the site in addition to the duties I had as a project group member and evaluator of the project.

2.2 Project group working methods

The group worked on the project utilising two main lines of communication: project meetings and on-line collaboration. There were a total of 6 project meetings:

- Tampere, Finland, December 2002
- Berlin, Germany, March 2003
- Catania, Italy, May 2003
- Perpignan, France, January 2004
- Berlin, Germany, May 2004
- Tampere, Finland, January 2005

I was present in all meetings except for the start-up meeting in Tampere, and have used my personal notes from them in preparing this thesis. The meetings consisted of workshops on different topics, such as using the selected tools, making pedagogic decisions and having guest lecturers present related theory. During these meetings, the group agreed on deadlines for producing material for the following meeting. Inbetween meetings, each partnering country worked largely on their own, producing necessary material, but steady communication was maintained through the use of online collaboration tools such as MSN Messenger. This allowed for multiple

individuals to be present at the same time and discuss any arising issues or key points in strategy.

The meetings of the group usually consisted of long discussions with different ideas being brought together in one or several workgroups. No official records were kept of the conversation as it went along; rather, the decisions made are reflected in the way the project material was constructed or changed during or after the meetings.

2.3 Project funding

The project was co-financed by the European Union Socrates Lingua 2 action. The projects that this programme funds are best described in the following (Council of Europe 2007) :

What is Lingua 2?

Objectives

- to help raise the standards in language teaching and learning by ensuring the availability of sufficient language learning instruments and tools for assessing linguistic skills acquired;
- to encourage the development of new materials and a wider dissemination of existing methods which represent best practice and provide European added-value.

More specifically, this action aims to:

- encourage innovation in the development of language learning and teaching tools;
- encourage the sharing of best practices;
- provide a wider variety of language teaching materials to more clearly defined target groups;
- encourage the production of language tools for the less widely used less taught languages;
- support educational approaches which are commercially under-represented or difficult to market on a large scale;
- encourage the acquisition of sufficient knowledge of foreign languages to meet the requirements of particular situations and contexts, provided that these measures are not linked to a specific profession (this would fall more within the scope of the Leonardo da Vinci programme);
- improve the distribution and availability of products.

[...]

What kinds of projects are funded?

The Commission will provide co-financing for projects which create, adapt, refine or exchange one or more of the following products:

- educational media and materials for foreign language teaching, as well as for raising awareness of languages;
- methods and tools designed to recognise and evaluate language skills;
- teaching and study programmes.

It is also notable that, according to the above, the Lingua 2 action requires that the material produced is generally applicable, and must not be limited to a particular area of interest or profession. The action website also encourages co-operation between different educational institutions – such as universities, polytechnics and institutes. These aspects were taken into account when assembling the Easy2 project group and choosing the target group for whom the product was designed.

2.4 Target group

The target group, as initially defined, was to be "disadvantaged young people". Disadvantaged, here, refers to people who have very low motivation and/or few opportunities for learning in general. This project wanted to provide them with means of expanding their horizons of understanding by promoting inter-cultural awareness and language learning. It could also be used to prepare them for their European placements which formed a part of their studies. All the vocational schools involved were from the hospitality studies field, but the funding of the project stated that vocabulary and structures must be general purpose and not limited to a particular trade. This also implied that the end product could be used by a much wider audience; it was suitable for the initial

education of any of the target languages on a variety of levels.

2.5 Languages used

The languages used in the learning environment would be those of the partnering countries. However, from the very beginning, it was decided that English would also be included in the languages, even though there was no native English-speaking partner in the project. The role of the English language was many-sided. It was the *lingua franca* of the project group, and all the meetings were held in English. Prototypes of reading texts and activities were prepared in English and then translated into the other languages. The navigational structure of the website was created entirely in English.

Also, especially the Italian partner wanted to use the English part of the environment in their teaching, i.e. teach English through Italian. They had student groups with very low skills in English and wanted the material to work for them, while the other partners were mainly interested in teaching Finnish, Italian, German and French through both their own languages and English – the user interface language. The inclusion of English, on the other hand, made the project especially feasible in terms of my research.

2.6 Technical background

In the beginning, the project had two main choices for the format of the end product: a CD-ROM or a website. The form of a website was decided on in early 2003, since it allowed for the editing and adding of material even after the initial release of the product, and was also more widely accessible for users. The site would work on a variety of computers and operating systems, allowing users with different technical means to access the environment. It was also decided that any online

functionality would be constructed in such a way as to allow for users with slower Internet access speeds to use the site to the maximum extent.

The number of partners and available languages meant that the amount of material on the website would quickly grow to hundreds of pages. Implementing all this as static HTML documents, in turn, would signify that even the smallest update would necessitate changes in most, or all, of the pages. In the Berlin meeting in March 2003, the group decided to search for another alternative in the form of an automated CMS (Content Management System). A CMS is an application that stores the information in a database and automatically generates the layout and navigational structure for each page. This way, the appearance of the site could be easily altered without touching the material itself, and also, the material could be edited as it was, without too much emphasis on the layout issues, allowing for different groups of people to edit the material for the different aspects.

As cost-effectiveness was a major issue in the project, a free-of-charge, open source alternative was sought for. The PHP programming language (PHP HTML Preprocessor) and a MySQL database appeared to be the best alternatives, since they could be used in the environment offered by a number of low-cost service providers. After some experimentation with alternatives, the postNuke CMS and webhosting provided by the Finnish Saunalahti Group were chosen. The CMS came with a number of ready-made features, which have been largely customised to meet the demands of the environment. The following description about the PostNuke system can be found on the authoring community's website (PostNuke 2005):

What is PostNuke (PN)?

Some may see PN as a weblog or content management system. But PN is more than that, PostNuke is a community, content, collaborative management system, a **C3MS**. It's your electronic toolbox, a set of tools allowing you to build a

dynamically generated web site that five years ago would have cost thousands of dollars to launch.

What makes PN unique?

PN is unique because it not only provides you with a wonderful set of tools, but it provides you with a community of users. PN is a community that responds to you when you need help or information.

Why is PN popular?

Because it is easy to install, easy to understand/use, and easy to administer. Anyone from the novice to the expert can install and administer a PN site. If you can transfer files to your hosting account then you can install PN. Above all these things, you can manage your site's content and data through any Internet connected web browser, anytime, anywhere!

A lot of the work on the site was carried out by the project participants themselves. Additional help was enlisted towards the end, as it became apparent that the extent of material was becoming too large for the group to handle on their own. Also, the site required improvements and modifications that were beyond the scope and capabilities of the project group, and they had to be implemented by a professional programmer.

2.6.1 Usability testing

In the spring of 2004, the University of Tampere Hypermedia Laboratory conducted usability testing on the online environment, then at a beta stage. The testing group found the idea of the site interesting and thought it offered varied ways of learning languages (Käytettävyyslaboratorio 2004:34). However, the report found a total of 145 usability shortcomings in the environment, most of which had to do with the functions of the PostNuke content management system. Ten of the shortcomings were considered critical in the report (Käytettävyyslaboratorio 2004:8-10). Based on these testing results, the environment was modified and further developed by a professional PHP programmer, with emphasis on improving the critical findings.

It is therefore notable that the usability testing and related report does not reflect the

completed status of the project, but instead, it was used as a halfway point in the construction, and significant changes were implemented into the environment after the evaluation was complete. Therefore, it is not of significant value for the purposes of this study.

2.7 Theoretical starting points

While the pedagogical theory, which supported the methods used to construct the entire learning environment and decide on a general approach and direction for the project, was chosen based on the presentations made to the group, the linguistic theory used to address the issues of language learning involved was not a conscious choice within the project group. Rather, it developed from the individual choices and discussions of those involved in creating the exercises. The working methods of the group were dynamic in nature and involved a very rich exchange of ideas. A study aimed at evaluating the results must therefore attempt to describe both the development process and the final product.

Thus, in order to be able to evaluate the project and its results, a solid theory was required. When observing and participating in the workings of the group, the Monitor Model hypothesis formulated by Stephen Krashen seemed to me to be the most suitable theory to explain and assess the decisions being made, even though it must be viewed critically when applying it to evaluate the environment.

3. Pedagogical theory: Experiential learning, ELP, Open dialogue and Authenticity

During the course of the project, in different stages, the group received guest presentations from the University of Tampere Department of Education. They mainly concerned the following four topics, which became integral to the foundation of the project:

- Experiential learning
- European Language Portfolio (ELP)
- Open dialogue and Authenticity

Below, I shall discuss these approaches and how they affected the starting points for the Easy2 project and the workings of the project group.

3.1 Experiential learning in language education

Experiential learning is defined as a learning approach where, as the name implies, the learner's personal first-hand experience plays a major part in learning (Kohonen 2001:22-23). The term is used to signify a range of educational approaches where formal learning, such as that in a school context, is integrated with practical work and informal learning. The techniques used by experiential learning aim at interactivity, promoting learning from experience and involving the learners actively in the learning process. Kohonen (2001:23) lists personal journals, stories, role

plays and visualisations as among these.

Experiential learning has its roots in theories on pedagogy and social, cognitive and humanistic psychology. According to Kohonen, the basic idea of experiential learning can be traced back to John Dewey's (1938) progressive pedagogy, which highly emphasises the importance of 'learning by doing'. Dewey also presented the concept of educative experience, according to which learning in one situation facilitates understanding in situations that follow. Kurt Lewin (1951), on the other hand, can be seen as a pioneer in bridging the gap between theory and practice, i.e. noting that an element of concept formation is essential for any learning. He also devised the four-stage learning stage model used as a basis for the entire concept: 1) *immediate concrete experience* is the basis for observation and reflection. It is followed by 2) *reflective observation* which leads to the formation of 3) *abstract concepts* and 4) *testing the implications* in new situations.

Another key concept of experiential learning is the notion of *personal constructs*. Kelly (1955) proposed the idea that each individual views reality through constructs that are unique to them. Individuals may revise their ideas and interpretations of the universe by altering these constructs. They also make sense of the world through these constructs - which may be a factor promoting personal success or hindering it. They respond to events in terms of their expected outcomes.

Humanistic psychology stresses the importance of personal experience in the growth of personality. Carl Rogers (1975) states that the individual's self-concept is a social product shaped gradually through interaction with the environment. The development of a healthy self-concept is promoted by positive self-regard and unconditional acceptance. One of the aims of experiential learning is the creation of an environment of unconditional positive regard.

Experiential learning aims at fostering an *interdependent* relationship between the learners and

teachers, and indeed, between the learners themselves. Dependent learners rely on someone telling them what to do, independent learners see learning as something they need to do themselves. However, to achieve maximum potential, learners need to become interdependent; to take independent responsibility on one hand, and understand that they can learn from others, on the other hand.

In American education, experiential learning has sometimes been considered a synonym for experiential education (cf. Wikipedia). Experiential education shares its roots with experiential learning, but essentially, it is an alternative education approach which is concerned with involving students with issues from outside the classroom, dramatically altering the traditional curriculum and carrying out education through project work. An important part of it consists of learner autonomy and self-learning from real-life situations; while these are prominent in experiential learning, they are treated differently. For example, Stevens and Richards (1992) quote schools switching from 45-minute time blocks to all-day schedules and using "adventure" and problem-solving, such as groups of students trying to get over a 12-foot wall, as part of the educational process. Indeed, as Kohonen (2005a:125) points out, much of the methodology of experiential learning is based on settings of informal learning, such as internships and exchange programs. This way, the two approaches are related, although not exactly synonymous.

Experiential learning in language education, as presented by Kohonen et al., on the other hand, does not go to such lengths in altering the basis of school education itself. There are numerous connecting features (Kohonen 2001:24), such as the emphasis on the learner's personal experience, but this take on experiential learning is more a goal definition for traditional classroom teaching than an attempt to alter the entire starting point of teaching and learning.

In using experiential learning in language education, the aim is to involve the learner directly

with the phenomenon at hand. Experiential language learning involves the learner as a whole person, through active participation, rather than simply hearing or reading about the phenomenon. This holistic view (Lehtovaara 1986:9) of the learner influences the basic approach of experiential learning. Learning is seen to be cognitive, affective and physiological at the same time. Learner initiative is highly valued, and the personal importance of the information to the learner is emphasised. Lehtovaara (1986:10) takes this even further by asserting that holistic learning is based on the basic value of every human being, their basic right to exist as what they are - whole persons - in society.

Compared to what might be referred to as the traditional idea of learning, holistic experiential learning places more importance on the student's subjective understanding of information. Rather than emphasising the value of supplying the learner with as much factually correct information as possible, the experiential learning approach focuses on making the learning experience relevant and useful to the learner in their present situation. Learning is seen as a cyclic process that involves experience, reflection, conceptualization and action. Much emphasis is laid on creating a non-judgmental atmosphere in order for the process to develop in a favourable direction for the individual.

The techniques introduced by the experiential learning approach consist of interactive methods allowing the participants to learn from each other's experiences. Kohonen (2006:10) lists diaries, portfolios, role plays, story-telling and discussions as examples. The idea is to observe the phenomenon, then do something with it. Experiencing the phenomena is as important as observing, and importantly, vice versa. As Kohonen (2005a:5) points out, only concepts that have been meaningfully experienced on the emotional level will become part of the learner's understanding.

3.2 Experiential learning in the classroom

In a classroom context, the introduction of experiential learning introduces a paradigm shift. The role of the teacher shifts from dispenser of information to co-explorer and co-author. Learning in itself, rather than being an immediately measurable act of acquiring facts, becomes a process where learners construct a meaningful reality, firstly and foremostly by themselves. Kohonen (1986:86) stresses that a feeling of success is a key factor in motivation for learning, but at the same time, the definition of success is a highly subjective concept. Therefore, to enable learners to succeed in meeting their own goals, the learning process must take into account their personal needs.

In language learning, this idea is perhaps more apparent than in other fields of education. In an ideal setting, each learner has their own motivation for learning a foreign language. In the traditional approach to learning, it is highly likely that those learners whose motivation is to learn grammar or do well at school in general, or who are well adapted to memorising information, have more experiences of success than other learners. Experiential learning aims at evening out this difference by encouraging learners to construct their own approach.

3.3 Applying Experiential Learning

The presentations made by representatives from the University of Tampere acted as starting points for discussion regarding what the group referred to as the "Theoretical Pillars" for the project. Experiential learning was chosen as one of these, based on the presentation made by Jorma Lehtovaara in Catania in May 2003. It may be argued that out of the three chosen (Experiential learning, open dialogue, authenticity), experiential learning is the most extensive approach, and it went furthest in setting an actual goal and framework for the entire project.

The group wanted the environment to allow for the users to, firstly, observe the language through the information presented on the website, and secondly, use the tools in the environment to experience it by contacting the other users and using the interactive features of the site. The aim was to create authentic content, based on experience from the everyday lives of the learners, so that the learners could relate to it and use their experience to broaden their knowledge. The aim was to discard what could be referred to as the 'grammar and translation' method as much as possible, and replace it by applying the concepts of experiential learning in the language learning environment.

3.4 European Language Portfolio

Another key learning theory influencing the construction of the project environment was the concept of the language portfolio. The European Language Portfolio is a part of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF). The CEF is a Council of Europe long-term project to promote language learning and teaching in a multi-cultural Europe. It especially emphasises intercultural communication and learner autonomy.

As part of this framework, the European Language Portfolio was conceived in the beginning of the 1990s (Kohonen 2005b:2). After a series of successful pilot projects, the ELP was recommended for widespread use and implementation.

The Language Portfolio consists of three main parts: the Language Passport, Language Biography and Dossier. The Language Passport provides an overview of the language proficiency of the user, utilising the definitions in the Common European Framework. The Language Biography is a collection of learner experience from both formal and informal educational contexts. It may be arranged in the form of 'can do' statements which the learner uses to state their competence in the given language.

Thirdly, the Dossier is a selection of materials, chosen by the learner, which document and illustrate the progress of the learner in different aspects of language learning. The range of items chosen may vary greatly depending on the goals of the learner for any given language or task.

3.4.1 Electronic portfolio

The introduction of new information technology has also evolved the concept of the portfolio. Kohonen et al (2006: 2) suggest that portfolios may be built on technologies such as weblogs and wikis. All these technologies combine text with images and other file types, such as sound clips and animations. This technological approach widens the possibilities for different types of language competence samples to be used in the dossier.

3.5 Applying the Language Portfolio and Common European Framework

The concept of the learner portfolio was introduced into the Easy2 environment by constructing a personal journal, or weblog, for each user, called the DiaryBox. This was designed as a 'user notebook' which could contain their notes, remarks and answers to activities posted on the site. In addition to text, the user could upload images. Each DiaryBox entry could be made public or private; in the latter case, only system administrators or teachers could gain access to these entries. This way, the aim was for the users to be able to construct their own dossier of learning samples.

Aside from using the Language Portfolio section of the Common European Framework, the CEF was also chosen to provide a basis for the level of language used in the learning material. The framework divides language competence into a total of 6 levels (CEF:23):

A (Basic User): A1 Breakthrough Level, A2 Waystage Level

B (Independent User): B1 Threshold Level, B2 Vantage Level

C (Proficient User): C1 Effective Operational Proficiency Level, C2 Mastery Level

The Easy2 project focuses on the beginner level learners of its target languages. The goal is to allow for the users of the material to accumulate A1 level knowledge of the language studied. The description of a speaker of A1 level language in the Common European Framework is as follows (CEF:24):

Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

In the opinion of the group, and indeed, in accordance with Krashen's Input Hypothesis, learners are able to take in and understand language at *level i + 1* (cf. Input Hypothesis below). Some of the material, therefore, is of A2 level, which is described in terms of 'can do' statements by the Common European Framework as follows (CEF:24):

Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.

3.5.1 'Can do' statements

When defining the level of language, the Common European Framework presents the learner with a checklist of things that he/she can do once having acquired a certain level of language. Table 1 presents these statements concerning the A1 level of language (CEF:231-234):

CEF Level	READING
A1	I can understand the general idea of simple informational texts and short simple descriptions, especially if they contain pictures which help to explain the text.
A1	I can understand very short, simple texts, putting together familiar names, words and basic phrases, by for example rereading parts of the text.

CEF Level	READING
A1	I can follow short, simple written instructions, especially if they contain pictures.
A1	I can recognise familiar names, words and very simple phrases on simple notices in the most common everyday situations.
A1	I can understand short, simple messages, e.g. on postcards.
WRITING	
A1	I can give short, basic descriptions of events and activities.
A1	I can write very simple personal letters expressing thanks and apology.
A1	I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters of everyday life.
A1	I can describe plans and arrangements.
A1	I can explain what I like or dislike about something.
A1	I can describe my family, living conditions, schooling, present or most recent job.
A1	I can describe past activities and personal experiences.
LISTENING	
A1	I can understand everyday expressions dealing with simple and concrete everyday needs, in clear, slow and repeated speech.
A1	I can follow speech which is very slow and carefully articulated, with long pauses for me to get the meaning.
A1	I can understand questions and instructions and follow short, simple directions.
A1	I can understand numbers, prices and times.

Table 1. A1 level 'can do' statements in the Common European Framework

To facilitate this approach, the Easy2 project group prepared its own learner checklist for the learning material, divided into sections by the different Stories on the web site. The development

and content of the Stories will be discussed below. By using this list, it is possible for the learner to self-evaluate whether he/she has met the required goals for the story in question. They are also useful for the course trainer when preparing evaluation based on the material. These 'can do' statements are presented in Table 2.

Name of story	<i>Party with friends</i>	<i>Street Food</i>	<i>Discotheque</i>	<i>First day at work</i>
'Can do' statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can understand days of the week and times of day when somebody speaks slowly and carefully. - I can ask simple questions and reply to them with 'yes' or 'no'. - I can react correctly to somebody greeting me. - I can respond to an introduction of a person in a simple way. - I can say hello and good-bye. - I can understand information about people when they are introduced to me (friend, sister, age). - I can ask people questions about where they live, what they like. - I can write a note to somebody to tell where I am or where we are to meet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can understand words and phrases in signs. - I can order food and drink by using words and body language. - I can handle basic quantities (small, big, large, bottle). - I can comment on things in a simple way (good, great). - I can understand basic words to do with food. - I can ask to pay in a restaurant. - I can ask for and understand the cost of items. - I can ask someone to repeat what they said. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can understand the age limit and admission fee in a bar or club. - I can introduce people of my own age and reply to introductions. - I can tell people personal information about myself (age, address, telephone number). - I can suggest something to other people. - I can give others simple advice in doing something. - I can understand and use words to do with time (tomorrow, next week). - I can signal when I understand something, either with words or body language. - I can call for a waiter/waitress in a restaurant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can respond correctly when I am introduced to someone older than me. - I can give information about where I come from. - I can understand and use words to do with the time (7 o'clock, 10.35). - I can understand simple instructions about work. - I can ask simple questions about my tasks in a workplace. - I can understand simple directions (under, in front of). - I can express my like and dislike about something. - I can express what languages I can speak.
Name of story	<i>Shopping</i>	<i>Accommodation</i>	<i>On the phone</i>	<i>Arrival</i>
'Can do' statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can greet and reply to greetings from someone I have met before. - I can ask and reply questions about the well-being of others. - I can suggest things to people and reply to suggestions. - I can deal with money and prices. - I can understand and use basic words to do with clothing. - I can make simple purchases. - I can write a greeting card (a birthday card, Christmas card). - I can ask for attention (Excuse me). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can point out places in a town. - I can ask for simple directions and understand them. - I can ask for and reserve accommodation. - I can understand and fill in a simple registration form. - I can understand addresses and words to do with local transport. - I can use local transport. - I can react to small changes in the discussion (sorry, but...). - I can present identification or other documents when asked for them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can understand the most important messages in electronic equipment (phones, computers). - I can understand short, simple messages (SMS, email). - I can ask for and give out telephone numbers. - I can ask people to speak more slowly or louder. - I can ask people to do things. - I can describe where I am. - I can correctly begin and end a phone call. - I can indicate that I am following the conversation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can understand basic announcements. - I can understand simple descriptions of weather. - I can use a taxi. - I can welcome someone and reply to a welcome. - I can understand the locations in a home. - I can describe where I live. - I can buy a ticket for public transport. - I can write a simple description about myself.

Table 2. 'Can do' statements in the Easy2 learning material.

3.6 Open dialogue

The third key pedagogical concept in the construction of the framework was the notion of "open dialogue". This concept deals with student-teacher interaction in the learning situation. The founding ideas of open dialogue lie within the philosophy of Martin Buber, the notion that every person constructs their ideas of the world through the presence and involvement of others; that every "I" develops from a "Thou". In this respect, Buber argues that indeed, all information that is true and relevant is developed through a dialogue in an "I - Thou" relationship, instead of the "I - It" relationship, where the person's approach to the persons and things is objective and technical (Buber 1938:16-18). The dialogue resulting from this discourse between individuals is both the method and goal of a person's existence in the world (Värri 1997:82-83). Indeed, the individual may be seen to be born into a natural dialogue with reality (Lehtovaara 1994:214).

Open dialogue allows reality to be that which it intrinsically is. The openness requires that individuals are open to experiencing themselves and the different factors of their life situation. The core of the dialogue consists of listening to the other - as they are - in a non-judgmental atmosphere. (Lehtovaara 1996:43-44)

Jorma Lehtovaara (2001:167-169) also discusses open dialogue in language education. He suggests that through open dialogue, it is possible to avoid the typical learner-teacher setting and achieve a situation where the learner and teacher are both exploring the phenomena at hand, able to reflect it on their personal experience and perception of reality. The teacher is required to know and acknowledge their personal constructs of reality, their beliefs and ideas, and the way these are

constructed by their personal life history (Jaatinen & Lehtovaara 2005:226).

3.7 Authenticity

A feature of open dialogue, and the third pedagogical approach chosen as a 'pillar' for the construction of the environment, was the issue of authenticity in the learning situation. Authenticity, in the language learning context, refers especially to the relevance of the material at hand. The goal is to encourage multi-cultural learning by presenting material required for a sufficient level of communication between learners. This way, the 'openness' of the dialogue may also be ensured to a necessary level (Kaikkonen 2005: 255).

3.8 Applying open dialogue and authenticity

Open dialogue was chosen as one of the foundations of the project for the non-judgmental atmosphere it offers, which was seen to suit the target group of learners with low motivation for conventional learning methods. Also, the use of computer technology was seen to put many teachers rather naturally in the role of co-explorer - as they might not be much more familiar with the technology than their students.

Authenticity was a key goal for largely the same reasons. The project group wanted to ensure that the material chosen would be what the students require for daily communication in the outside world or within the learning environment itself. It was also hoped that this would promote motivation for study using the environment. A number of communicative tools were set up for the students to use for communicating amongst themselves, with teachers and foremostly, with other

students from other countries.

3.9 Open dialogue and authenticity in the working methods of the project group

After the presentation made by Jorma Lehtovaara during the Catania meeting in May 2003, involving the 'theoretical pillars', the project group embraced the notions of open dialogue in a remarkable way and committed to them in their work. They stressed the importance of a non-judgmental working environment and every opportunity was taken to point out the need to be 'directly in touch with the realities'. While this was often done in a playful manner, it nevertheless served to keep the ideas in mind and related them to the actual work carried out.

4. Linguistic theory: Stephen Krashen's Monitor Model

The Monitor Model is a theory of language acquisition which is still the topic of much discussion today, despite being formulated in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Created mainly by Stephen Krashen, it may be considered the first comprehensive model of second language acquisition (Mitchell & Myles 1998:39, 126-127).

The Monitor Model theory is formulated around five central hypotheses, which I will briefly account for in the following.

4.1 The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis

Krashen argues that language acquisition and language learning are indeed separate processes. By acquisition, he refers to a subconscious process similar to that used by children to learn their first language, by using language for real communication (Krashen 1982:10, Krashen & Terrell 1983:26). Accordingly, language acquisition is seen as the 'natural' way of developing linguistic ability.

Learning, on the other hand, is understood as a conscious process of seeking formal knowledge of the language (Krashen & Terrell 1983:26-27). Put differently, learning means developing explicit knowledge of the rules in a language, acquisition means having an implicit understanding, a "feel" for what is correct.

The hypothesis states that the ability for child-like natural learning does not disappear from adults. The extent of what can be learned varies, but the basic concept remains the same. What this implies, in turn, is that adults have two parallel, independent ways of developing competence in a language (Krashen 1982:10). By stimulating meaningful interaction in the target language,

processes similar to those governing first language acquisition may be triggered. Importantly, Krashen does not limit this communication outside of the classroom, indicating that naturalistic language learning situations may take place in a teaching environment.

Another key starting point for this hypothesis is that child language acquisition research has shown error correction to be relatively insignificant to language learning. Parents, for example, only occasionally correct their children's grammatical errors, but largely focus on the communicational value of what they are saying. Krashen (1982:11) states that the same appears to apply to adult learners. In this respect, therefore, error correction need not be a key focus area when constructing a natural language acquisition environment.

Krashen has been criticised for being too vague in the definition of these terms and failing to create a 'superordinate category' to make the acquisition process exactly clear (e.g. Mitchell & Myles 1998:36), but the distinction made between these two processes certainly seems to have struck a chord amongst the teaching community.

4.2 The Monitor Hypothesis

Building on the basis of the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, Krashen argues that the role of the products of conscious, or guided, learning in the language learning process is to act as 'Monitor'. The Monitor is seen to act as a "filter", adjusting the utterance before it is actually spoken or written (or afterwards, in which case self-repair occurs) (Krashen 1982:15-16).

The utterance, on the other hand, is entirely the product of the acquisition process. Formal knowledge of the language is not responsible for spoken fluency. The learners are thought to gradually adjust their output based on how much conscious learning takes place and how much time they have to focus on form instead of function. Indeed, Krashen & Terrell (1983:30-31)

summarise this by saying that the Monitor is applied if three prerequisites are met: knowledge of form, adequate time to apply it and a focus on form in the activity. This in turn implies that Monitor use is relatively limited, and in normal communication, acquired language skills have higher significance than learned formal rules.

The Monitor Hypothesis attempts to explain differences between learners by defining Monitor 'over-users' and 'under-users'. Over-users do their best to try to avoid mistakes, resulting in less fluent speech. Under-users, on the other hand, are more focused on the speed and fluency of communication, and apply the acquired system instead of the Monitor system. The optimal case may be found inbetween, in learners who apply the Monitor when appropriate - i.e. when it does not disturb communication.

Importantly, Krashen & Terrell (1983:31-32) state that learners may self-correct and edit their utterances using acquired skills. The basis of the hypothesis is to imply that the Monitor itself does not initiate language production; instead, conscious learning may only serve to correct acquired utterances.

The obvious problem with the Monitor Hypothesis is that it is impossible to verify scientifically (Mitchell & Myles 1998:37). Learners do not behave differently when they are applying a rule consciously, as opposed to when they are only using the acquired system. However, the notion is not without merit in language teaching - there are learners who focus on form versus function, and they might benefit from a degree of freedom in their language use. Learners who are very liberal with their language use, on the other hand, may want to improve their knowledge of rules to communicate more effectively. It is nevertheless important to note that differences in 'Monitor use' may also be explained by learner self-esteem and their placement on the introvert/extrovert axis.

4.3 The Natural Order Hypothesis

Another part of the Monitor Model is the assumption that the rules applied are learned in a fixed order, independently of the order that they are taught in (Krashen & Terrell 1983:28). The natural order hypothesis states that, while every acquirer will not acquire grammatical structures in the exact same order, certain structures tend to be acquired early, others later on.

Most of the evidence presented draws on English morphology. Children learning English as their first language tend to acquire certain grammatical morphemes earlier than others. Studies in second language acquisition are stated to have confirmed this order to apply to children and adult learning.

Krashen (1982:12) discusses the role of the Monitor in disturbing the natural order. When learners are in a situation that requires, and gives time, for them to use the Monitor, items that are categorised 'learnable' take priority over certain items lower in the natural order of acquisition. According to Krashen, this also means that the Monitor is better at some rules than others.

This part of the hypothesis has been heavily criticised (Mitchell & Myles 1998:37), and while there appears to be some evidence to support the statement (cf. Haley & Rentz 2002), the notion remains vague and the evidence so far somewhat cursory. Krashen himself supplies little direct evidence, wording it as "remarkable similarity" (Krashen & Terrell 1983:29) and indeed, states that the Input Hypothesis in itself means that Natural Order should not be used as a basis for teaching in a particular order (Krashen 1982:26).

4.4 The Input Hypothesis

The next hypothesis in the continuum is linked to the Natural Order Hypothesis. The Input Hypothesis states that progress along the natural order may be made if the learner receives what

qualifies as 'comprehensible input' slightly beyond the current learner competence in terms of syntactic complexity (Krashen 1982:21). The idea is, simply put, that the learner is able to take in more complex language than she is able to produce - the reoccurring notion of 'level $i + 1$ ' has its roots in this hypothesis. By being exposed to this 'rich input', the learner is expected to acquire the necessary grammatical competence. It is important to note that the Input Hypothesis is related to the acquisition process - not necessarily learning. While learning has traditionally been about learning structures, the Input Hypothesis states we must focus on meaning, allowing structures to be learned along the way.

Accordingly, Krashen advises against constructing a curriculum based on the learning of rules, but instead, recommends focusing on providing meaningful input. In a grammatical syllabus, missing a class on a grammatical structure means it will not be learned - and cannot be used. Good comprehensible input means the structure may be derived by interpreting said input. (Krashen 1982:23) Speaking and writing cannot be taught directly, they will 'come in time'. Language which contains elements beyond the current level of competence may still be understood through the context of speech and available extra-linguistic information. In language teaching, this may be provided by using visual clues and other extra-linguistic material. Krashen (1982:24-25) actually states that, for a beginner, the language classroom may be a more suitable location for receiving good input, since the outside world often supplies input that is too far beyond the current level of competence.

Krashen & Terrell (1983:35) also argue that 'interlanguage talk' among second language learners may be very useful for language acquisition, and may provide many learners with the 'i+1' they require to progress to the next level of language. This is because learners usually intend to use the language for real communication and there are differences in the level of language between

individuals.

The problem with the Input Hypothesis is that, again, the level definitions are very abstract and not verifiable (Mitchell & Myles 1998:38, 126). Krashen himself (1982:21, Krashen & Terrell 1983:33) states that, despite the definition of 'i+1', the '+1' may in fact contain several elements which are previously unknown to the learner - as long as they still understand what is being said. However, it can be considered common sense that complete knowledge of every structure or word is not required to understand a new passage of language.

4.5 The Affective Filter Hypothesis

According to Krashen, the 'affective filter' is a device which aims at explaining the learner differences in receptibility to language input. Learners with a 'high filter', caused by e.g. low self esteem, low motivation and anxiety, will have more difficulties in language acquisition than those with a 'low filter'. It is notable that formal learning may be seemingly unaffected by the affective filter (Krashen & Terrell 1983: 38).

Learners with low filters are more active in seeking communication, thus creating more opportunities for language acquisition. This is of particular importance when constructing a language learning environment. The aim of language teaching must be to lower the affective filter and supply good, comprehensible input. Krashen states that classrooms which encourage low filters are those that promote low anxiety among students (1982:32).

Mitchell & Myles (1998:39) describe the notion of the affective filter as 'highly abstract' and not universally applicable. Taking this into account, it may nevertheless be a useful way of trying to formulate the commonly understood differences in learner motivation into a usable framework.

4.6 Applying the Monitor Model

Despite the criticism, the Monitor Model has numerous merits. To a notable degree, it succeeds in formalising issues which have been 'common knowledge' to language teachers, and although the model consists of hypotheses which are hard to measure quantitatively, it has had a significant effect on the way language acquisition is perceived today.

Within the Easy2 project group, discovering a suitable language acquisition theory to be applied to the project and to be used as the basis for evaluation was solely my responsibility. As I observed the workings of the group, the Monitor Model appeared to come up time after time - for example, the idea of introducing the learners to a level of language slightly above their current skills, which quite spontaneously emerged within the group, is directly involved with the Input Hypothesis. Providing several means for learners to communicate in their 'interlanguage' is further proof of the suitability of this theory for describing the approach of the group.

Grammatical structures were designed to be taught using visual clues and building and expanding on what the learners have already encountered in their reading. Also, embracing the approaches of experiential learning and open dialogue, aiming to create a non-judgmental atmosphere and promote meaningful learning from experience, may be directly seen to involve the application of the Affective Filter Hypothesis - low anxiety and low pressure leads to low filters.

The Easy2 project group wanted to focus on communicative situations rather than grammatical exercises, to motivate the learners to use the language in the contexts of their own lives – since traditional, school-type education had already largely failed for the target group. Krashen's view of language acquisition, the natural approach as it were, wishes to avoid drills and form-focus, replacing it with meaningful communication.

The working methods of the group were not theory-oriented. Each step in the construction of

the environment was motivated by personal input from the teachers and other members of the group. This is important to note when evaluating the results; while the Monitor Model quite obviously comes closest to describing the starting points of the project, it was not the agreed-upon basis, nor did the group intend to follow it systematically.

In the following chapters, I shall present the different aspects of the learning environment and assess them in terms of the theoretical starting points presented above.

5. Construction of the environment

5.1 Overview and definitions

The Easy2 language learning environment consists of texts, called *Stories*, and other content formed around them: *ToolBoxes* which teach the use of grammatical structures, *WordBoxes* that provide vocabulary, and *Activities* in which material from the Stories, ToolBoxes and WordBoxes is combined in the form of textbook-style exercises.

It must be noted that everything presented in this section is available on the site in all five project languages. English has been chosen to be presented here, since it was the language originally used to prepare all material, and it is the object of my study.

As the user enters the site, the Stories are presented in the form of an interactive picture depicting "Easytown", where the stories take place (Image 1):

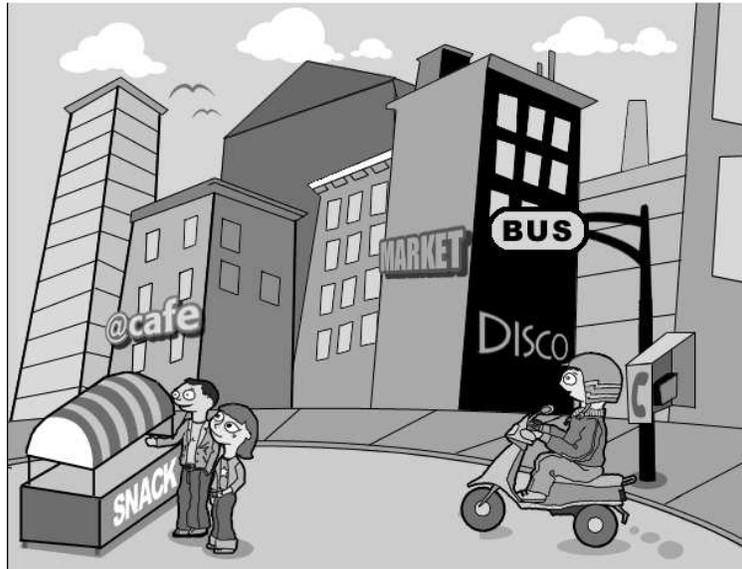


Image 1. View of "Easytown" on the website.

When the mouse cursor is hovered over a "hotspot" in the image, the graphic changes to indicate that a Story may be accessed by clicking on this part of the image. The Stories are divided into four sections, each on their own pages.

The layout chosen was, as nearly everything else in the environment, the result of continuous experimentation on the part of the project group. The first graphical mock-ups of the website presented the different situations e.g. in the form of a dancefloor. The idea of a "common European village" was first brought up in the Berlin meeting in March 2003, inspired by the project members coming from different parts of the continent and presenting their different stories and experiences to others. The notion of "Easytown", a language learning community, was born from this outset.

For each Story section, the related ToolBoxes, WordBoxes and Activities are presented in a menu (Image 2).



Image 2. Related material for Story section.

The menu presents the order in which the authors recommend the WordBoxes, ToolBoxes and Activities are used as the Stories are read. There is no particular, fixed order for the Stories.

The communicative tools include the *DiaryBox* for user self-reflection, *ShoutBox* for instant communication between users, *Chat* for more varied instant messaging, and the *Town Square* discussion forum. These are accessible at all times from the left-hand side menu of the website. The ShoutBox functionality is visible regardless of the page the user is in.

This basic technical framework was used to construct the main features of the learning environment. In the following, I shall analyse the main sections of the site one by one.

5.2 Teaching grammar: Development of the ToolBox

Grammar is perhaps the most demanding subject as regards the preparation of learning material, in

particular for an online environment such as Easy2. Different people from different countries had varying ideas about how grammar should be introduced into the Easy2 environment, and what the importance of grammar was on the whole. The only thing that universal agreement was found on was that some type of grammatical instruction would be needed, but the form of it was largely under debate from the very beginning.

To understand the special needs placed on the material, one needs to go back to the two original starting points: needs of the target group and A1 level of language. The students who would form the core user group of the environment had previously failed in their language studies, or had very low motivation for starting the study of language in a conventional fashion. Therefore, the material had to be presented in a manner different from that of conventional textbooks. Also, the target level of the language does not necessitate grammatical correctness to a significant extent (cf. CEF:24).

This set of starting points allowed the group to approach the issue of grammar from a variety of directions. It did not, however, make the task easier, since all the language experts in the group had strong backgrounds in traditional language teaching. Separating oneself from tradition to produce a different type of material was a long process, the traces of which can be seen when the development of the ToolBoxes is examined.

5.2.1 On the development of ToolBoxes

The creation of the material started by writing the texts for the Stories. In accordance with the general theory chosen, the grammar items were originally designed to support the understanding of the text and expand on the ideas presented. The issues presented by them would be based on the texts, and they would be connected by links from the sentences that have the first occurrence of this

structure. Initially, they were called "linguistic glossaries", implying that they were lists of grammatical information related to the text at hand. The name was very quickly changed to ToolBox (Italy meeting, Catania, spring 2003) since the working title was deemed too complicated and confusing.

5.2.2 Multilingual vs. monolingual

The initial drafts of the ToolBoxes created by the Finnish team in the summer of 2003 appear to be reminiscent of a mindmap, even though this was not a conscious decision within the group. In the centre, we have the verb "to take" in Finnish and English. Arrows point to the left and the right, into boxes where we have the present tense of the verb in both languages, in all finite forms. No further explanation is given (Image 3).

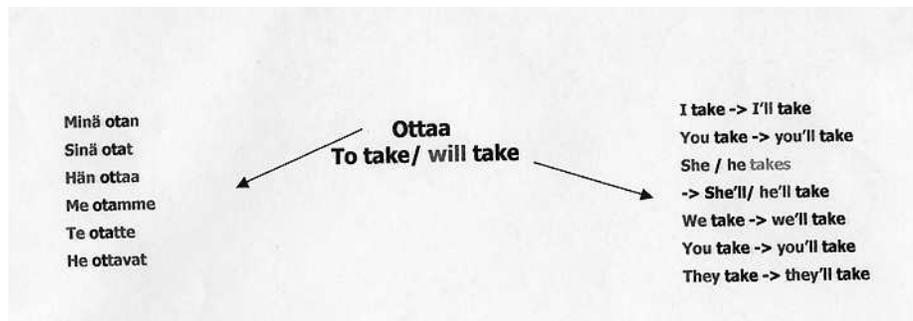


Image 3. Toolbox for "Ottaa / To take"

The question of whether or not the ToolBoxes should be in one language or several was the topic of lengthy discussion. Finally, the conclusion was drawn that, if two languages would be used in one Toolbox, the group would have to prepare "combination ToolBoxes" for all of the languages in the

project: Finnish with English, Finnish with Italian, Finnish with German, Finnish with French, French with Finnish, French with English etc. Thus, the workload required would quickly multiply beyond the resources of the group.

Another, theoretically vastly more important reason for choosing the monolingual method was to try and attempt a somewhat different approach at teaching grammar. Traditionally, grammar has been taught precisely in the way that was initially planned for Easy2 as well: forms of the first language and target language are displayed side by side, and the reader is expected to draw conclusions and analogies.

However, a further look into one of the learning approaches chosen for the project, experiential learning, reveals that there appears to be another way to deal with the issue. Kohonen (1986:118) points out that communicative competence is much more than the traditional teaching requirement of linguistic accuracy. Therefore, the group wanted to approach linguistic accuracy by starting from the opposite end as well. Instead of presenting a list of rules which then will be applied, and most likely writing or editing the texts to suit the needs of this list, the group would start off by choosing examples from the texts at hand and categorizing them to determine which structures are present and which are required. This was considered a departure from the norm, since here, communicative language use is given utmost priority, even to the point where 'control' of what grammar is presented is handed over to the original texts. In other words, grammatical structures would be used as 'tools' – hence the name – to express things and ideas similar to those presented in the dialogue texts.

Dulay, Burt & Krashen (1982:263-264) support this notion in the guidelines they present to teachers wishing to adopt their approach to second language acquisition. In their checklist, they emphasize the importance of maximizing student exposure to natural communication, where focus

is on the message, not the form. They value real questions, which might be presented to any native speaker, instead of artificial ones, where the answer is already known or of no interest to anybody. They also encourage teachers to respond to content, not form, when communicating with learners.

Furthermore, they prohibit referring to the first language of the learner when teaching a second language (ibid.:269), since the two are separate systems and should be maintained as such. It would thus seem that the project group had, based on both the ideas brought up in discussion and the pedagogical background, ended up with an approach very close to the one they are presenting.

5.2.3 Grammatical vs. communicative

Despite the agreement on the starting points, looking at the lists prepared in the Tampere meeting in October 2003, we can see that the starting point was very grammatical in itself. Items are meticulously listed under titles such as "Present Continuous" and "Negation" (cf. Image 4). However, in the very same meeting, it was decided that grammatical meta-language will be done away with, and the ToolBoxes will have unique names based on the contents. This way, the name of the Toolbox would also be relevant to the student and give an idea of what is presented.

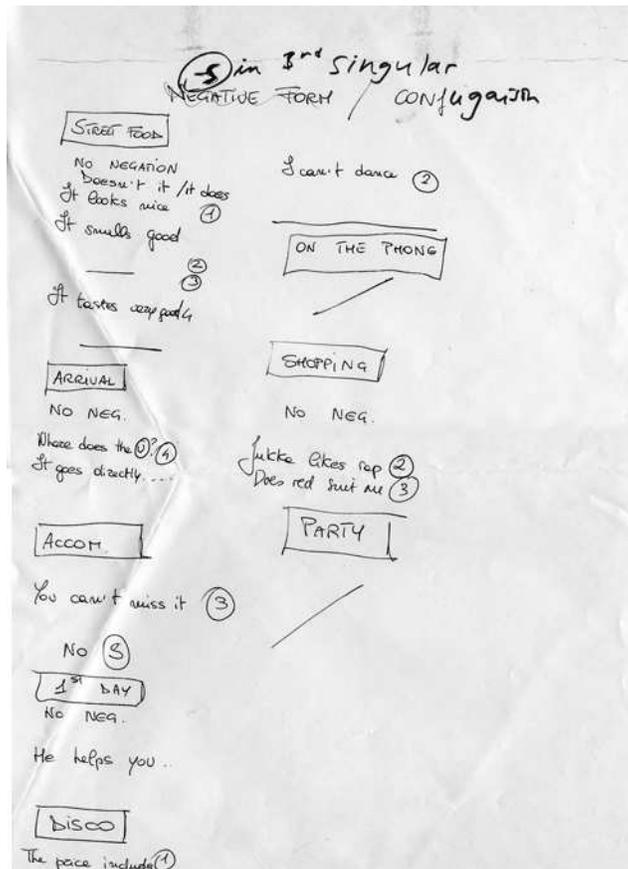


Image 4. Examples of negation and 3rd person singular in the dialogue texts, as marked by the group.

Kohonen (1986:127) also suggests that there may be better ways of learning language structures than memorising and repeating rules, examples and paradigms, and stresses the importance of learning language structure as a by-product of communicative use. This idea is repeated in, for example, Dulay, Burt & Krashen (1982:261-263). While it can be argued that even the approach selected is closely related to tradition, and repetition cannot be entirely avoided, the emphasis here is on individual rule formation by students instead of the 'rule plus example' approach. It is not an issue whether or not the rules created by the learners are exactly the same as the original ones - it is

enough for the present purpose that the language they create is communicative. The aim is to produce segments of language that the learners can combine into meaningful utterances. For this, the user does not need to know whether what they are using is a verb or an adjective, as long as they know how changing the unit changes the meaning of the structure.

5.2.4 Verbal vs. visual

To overcome the absence of verbal clues in the first language of the learner in the ToolBoxes, an alternative method had to be devised. In order to reach maximum usability over different languages, clip art images were used to present different situations where the structure presented was in use. Images were modified and combined where necessary to present the situation correctly. The choice of examples closely followed the original text: wherever examples were made up, to complete a series or make a point, they were based on the vocabulary and expressions used in the dialogue texts.

The chosen format was a table of a maximum of 3 by 3 cells, allowing for the display of 8 simultaneous examples (since the centre space was taken up by the title of the Toolbox). Image 5 presents a near-final version of the Toolbox for some auxiliary verbs:

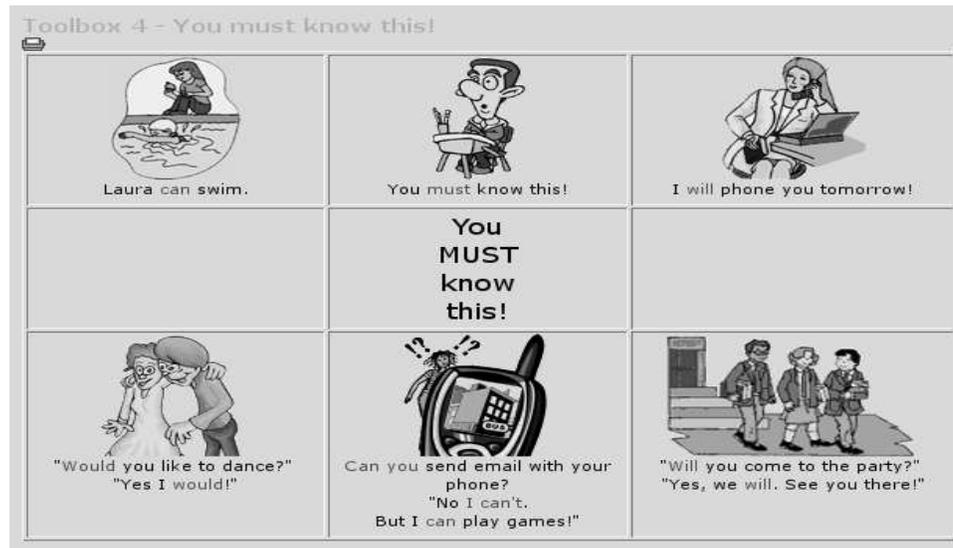


Image 5. ToolBox 4: "You must know this!"

The basic setting is that the structure presented is marked in a different colour within the text. The images provide visual clues. The purpose is to present any relevant examples in the context of the dialogue texts, and if significant variation occurs, also some other examples.

This approach does not stress the fact that grammar is a separate set of rules, but instead, these items are building blocks which, arranged in a suitable manner, create different types of meaning. This is evident in the way the Toolbox combines auxiliaries such as *can* with the future tense *will* and conditional *would*, without supplying additional information on the way these auxiliaries modify the meaning. Analogy can be drawn to Kohonen (1986:128) and his views on primary teaching. The texts are not initially analysed for their structure - instead, understanding the factual contents is important. Grammatical structures are presented in a way comparable to vocabulary items.

5.3 Activities

Each of the ToolBoxes is supported by a set of activities. Created using the Hot Potatoes tool, the activities are perhaps the most traditional feature of the environment. Even though some of the activities have been designed to be authentic and are built on real-life examples, most of the material is reminiscent of textbook activities. The main reason for using this tool was that Hot Potatoes was the only noteworthy, affordable product available for producing online exercise material. It is built from the ground up to be an extension of textbook-style content.

A review of the Hot Potatoes software suite (Arneil, Holnes & Street 2001: 28-33) points out that a major drawback of the software is that it tends to favour creating activities focused on form, where the only interaction taking place is that between the user and pre-scripted feedback. This in turn means that the activities are not very 'interactive' at all, but rather online versions of grammar activities.

The activities consist mainly of cloze-fill, mixed sentence, mix and match and multiple choice exercises. Two of these main types are presented in images 6 and 7.

Would you?



"Check" will show you if your answers are correct.
 "Hint" will help you but will take away points.
 Use these words:

can can Can Can can can Would Would Would

you like to dance?
 Yes, I would.
 you connect the phone to the computer?
 I play games, too.
 I help you?
 You slice vegetables.
 you like to go shopping?
 you like to look around?
 Where I buy a ticket?
 you give me your phone number?

Image 6. Hot Potatoes activity: "Would you?"

Adjectives



<= 4/8 =>

4. It was _____ meeting you.

A red
 B blue
 C expensive
 D nice

Image 7. Hot Potatoes activity: "Adjectives" (working title)

Images 6 and 7 suggest that communication in these exercises is not very coherent with the ideas presented in the theoretical framework. Especially in terms of Dulay, Burt & Krashen's (1982:261-

263) guidelines, they are lacking in a number of respects – emphasizing form over function and consisting of artificial sentences with no information gap.

However, it needs to be pointed out that the learning environment does have other types of activities that are more communicative, e.g. *ShoutBox* and *DiaryBox*. These activity types are non-judgmental in nature (i.e. they do not rate the learner or correct their mistakes automatically) and aim at promoting the functional use of the language in contrast to the linguistic correctness aspect. Therefore, it could be argued that the Hot Potatoes stand their ground as a type of monitor of conventional language competence and bridge the gap between traditional and modern methodologies. The Hot Potatoes exercises are easy to use and understand, and they provide clear feedback on the success or failure of the learner.

5.3.1 Mission: Easytown

The language learning maze game "Mission: Easytown", constructed prior to launch by Mikko Turunen and Francesco Majorana, is an off-shoot of the Hot Potatoes exercises, taking the form of a game using the Quandary maze-building application from Half Baked Software, the creator of Hot Potatoes. It is a fictional work based on events in a town, where the player must collect "language skill points" to be able to attend to a party.

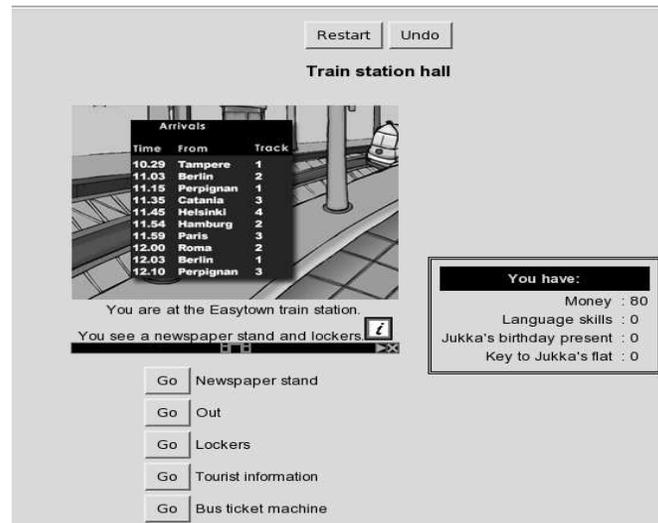


Image 8. Screenshot from "Mission Easytown"

Mission Easytown is an attractively presented game which seemed to appeal to guests during the launch events (personal notes from January 2005). From a pedagogical view, it is an extension of the Hot Potatoes activities: you can choose right or wrong, and proceed according to this feedback. The plotline and presentation, with sound samples and other material, however, make it appealing to complete the game and gain access to the party.

5.4 Teaching vocabulary: WordBoxes

Learning and teaching vocabulary has not been extensively researched, especially when compared to the other aspects of language acquisition. There seems to be only some sort of agreement on the fact that words are a key requirement to language learning, and in terms of text comprehension, they are more important than grammatical structures (e.g. Krantz 1991:9). This is, however, where the consensus ends. The debate of whether vocabularies should be mono- or bi-lingual is as old as language acquisition theory itself, and differing views on how to implement the vocabulary section

of the site were exchanged during the development of the Easy2 learning environment. Since, according to both the pedagogical approach selected and the general consensus in the group, working with words was seen as one of the key issues, the development process of the on-line vocabularies, called *WordBoxes*, shows us the different aspects of this issue.

As with all material in the Easy2 environment, the initial starting point for the vocabulary lists were the dialogue texts prepared by the students. From the beginning, it was decided that the site should contain some sort of vocabulary to support the reading of the Stories texts. Considering that the texts were rather short and contained limited vocabulary, it was decided very early on that the scope of the words used would be expanded. There was no initial decision, however, on whether the word lists should be in one language or several.

5.4.1 Vocabulary learning theory

Vocabulary acquisition is such an innate process in the learner that the nature of the phenomenon is generally considered difficult to define. Mostly, theories have been concerned with the different strategies for studying and learning words. Krantz (1991: 26) defines two main methods that are in use when a learner reads an unfamiliar passage and encounters new words: what he calls *READ-ONLY* and *READ-LOOK-UP* strategies. In the former, the learner tries to work out the meaning by looking at the context around it, and in the latter, he/she uses a vocabulary or another type of dictionary to look up words in the text. According to Krantz, *READ-ONLY* is a strategy more often connected to advanced language learners. However, the division between these two methods is not clear-cut, and in fact, nearly all learners tend to utilise a combination strategy.

Looking at the needs of the target group, again, we can establish that the learners targeted by the Easy2 project have not been very successful in their previous studies and would most likely require some sort of support for their language learning. However, regardless of the level of their

language, learners tend to utilise personal learning strategies which are not easily categorised. This must be borne in mind whenever a learning environment is being designed; even if some strategies are favoured, none can be omitted.

5.4.2 From thematical glossary to "WordBox"

Much like in the case of the *ToolBoxes* used for grammatical information, the vocabulary lists saw several phases of evolution before arriving at the final form. In the Italy meeting in Catania, spring 2003, it was decided that the texts would be linked to what were then known as *thematical glossaries* which would contain words to do with the themes of the Story text in question.

The implementation of the glossary was under much debate and experimentation, however. Images 9, 10 and 11 present some of the different approaches to vocabulary teaching suggested within the group. The images represent three different versions of glossaries from different partners, at different times during the summer and early autumn of 2003.

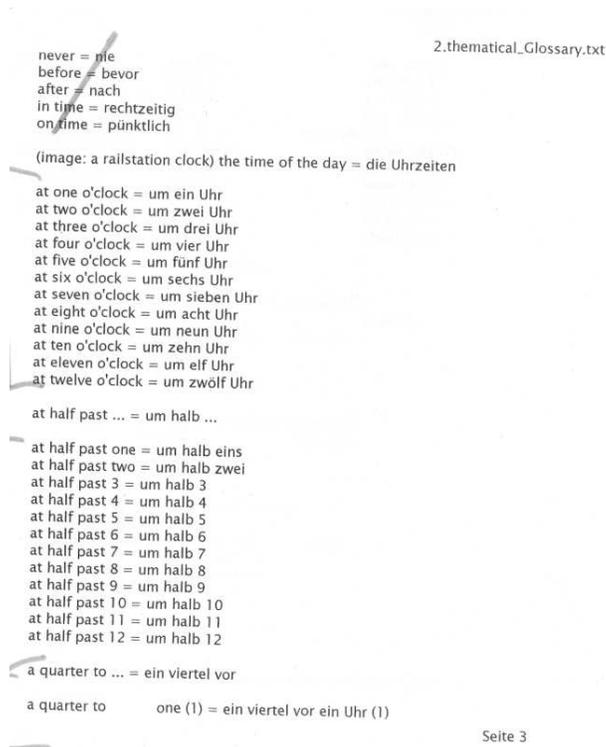


Image 9. Script for thematical glossary: Time (Story: "Arrival")

Image 9 is perhaps the most traditional of the approaches initially presented. It features images supporting a standard, bilingual dictionary. The presentation of the words is very systematic (half past 3, half past 4, half past 5).

Shortly afterwards, the thematical glossary was renamed to *WordBox* since the working title was deemed too complex and confusing and not easily presentable to the target group. Below is an example of another implementation of the same idea:

```

LES BOISSONS                                     Plw03fr

boissons = drinks
boire = to drink
se désaltérer = to quench your thirst

JUS DE FRUIT
<image> jus de fruit = fruit juice
<image> jus de raisin = grape juice
<image> jus de pomme = apple juice
<image> jus d'abricot = apricot juice
<image> jus de pamplemousse = grapefruit juice
<image> jus de tomate = tomato juice
<image> jus d'orange = orange juice
<image> jus d'ananas = pineapple juice
<image> jus de cerise = cherry juice
<image> jus de citron = lemon juice

BOISSONS CHAUDES
<image> chocolat chaud
<image> café
<image> thé
<image> infusion

BOISSONS FROIDES
<image> sirop
<image> soda
<image> thé glacé
<image> limonade = lemonade
<image> diabolio
<image> eau plate
<image> eau gazeuse
<image> lait

ALCOOLS
<image> bière un demi
<image> panaché
<image> alcools
<image> champagne
<image> vin rouge
<image> vin blanc

VARIETE DE VERRES
<image> un verre
<image> une coupe
<image> un verre à whisky
<image> un verre à jus de fruit
<image> un verre à vin

```

Image 10. Script for WordBox: Drinks (Story: "Discotheque")

The WordBox in Image 10 relies on combining images with descriptions (the English, since only partially available, is presumably intended as a support for the people preparing the images). The words are also divided into thematical sets (hot drinks, cold drinks etc.).

A third intermediate version was created by the Finnish team to support one of the texts prepared by them (Image 11).

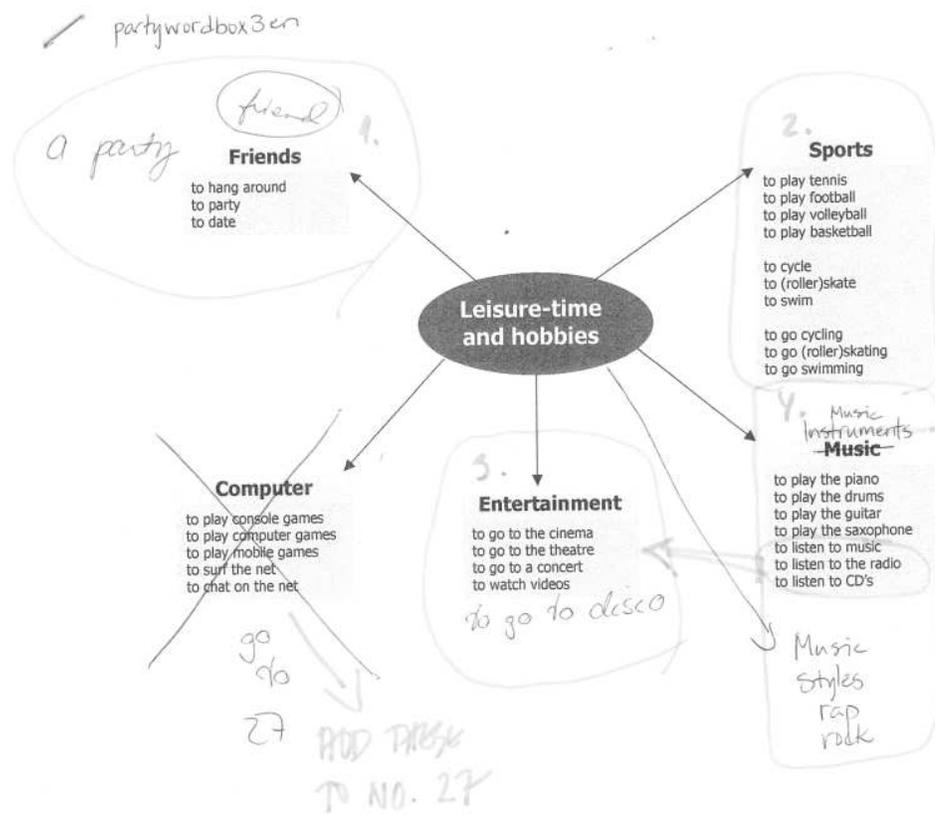


Image 11. Script for WordBox: Leisure time and hobbies
(Story: "Party with friends")

Image 11 is perhaps the most "modern", in a pedagogical sense, of the intermediate WordBox scripts presented, taking the form of a mind map (cf. Image 3 prepared by the same group). As in Image 10, words are categorised under different topics. Already, lots of changes in themes can be seen, and word themes are moved between different dialogue texts.

5.4.3 Multi-lingual WordBox

When viewed from a technical point of view, all of these WordBox prototypes were equally difficult to produce. However, the very picture-intensive format of Image 10 was soon decided

against, since it required an amount of pictures that was difficult and time-consuming to produce, even with the help of clip art libraries. The mindmap was hard to implement graphically to be exactly as pictured in Image 11. The one in Image 9 was deemed too repetitive, even though it had the bi-lingual approach which was favourable in some respects.

The initial solution was something of a compromise between all of these ideas. The words would be thematically arranged, but they would have first-language translations. WordBoxes would be arranged around different themes, instead of containing only words from a certain story. About 25 different themes were decided on. WordBoxes were prepared by different groups, then translated into each language.

During the online layout of the material, the idea occurred to the IT team to put the translations side-by-side, creating a 5-language WordBox. The idea was considered by the language teacher group and approved of, by virtue of the following:

- Having all words in one place makes the material more simple to access
- Monolingual descriptions were intuitively seen as difficult for the learners at A1 level
- Having translations side-by-side allows learners to compare languages

Image 12 presents a version of the end result at beta stage.

Wordbox 30: Jobs

JOBS

 Hotelli ja ravintola	 Hotel and Restaurant	 Hotel und Restaurant	 Hotel e Ristorante
1. kouluttaja	1. trainer	1. der Ausbilder/die Ausbilderin	1. il formatore/la formatrice
2. opiskelija	2. trainee	2. der Auszubildender/die Auszubildende	2. l'allievo/l'allieva
3. tarjoilija	3. waiter/waitress	3. der Kellner/die Kellnerin	3. il cameriere/la cameriera
4. baarimikko	4. bartender	4. der Barmixer/ die Barmixerin	4. il barman
5. kokki	5. cook / chef	5. der Koch/die Köchin	5. il cuoco/la cuoca
6. leipuri	6. baker	6. der Bäcker/ die Bäckerin	6. il panettiere
7. vastaanottovirkailija	7. receptionist	7. der Rezeptionist/die Rezeptionistin	7. l'addetto al ricevimento
8. kerrossivooja	8. floor attendant	8. der Türsteher/ die Türsteherin	8. la governante
9. emäntä	9. housekeeper	9. der Hausmeister/ die Hausmeisterin	9. il/la cameriere/a ai piani
10. suurtaloukokki	10. caterer	10. der Gastronom/ die Gastronomin	10. -----
11. kantaja	11. porter	11. der Pförtner/ die Pförtnerin	11. il facchino
12. omistaja	12. landlord/landlady	12. der Gastwirt/ die Gastwirtin	12. il proprietario

 Kuljetus	 Services and Entertainment	 Dienstleistung and Unterhaltung	 Servizi e divertimenti
1. konduktööri	1. sales clerk	1. Verkäufer/Verkäuferin	1. il commesso/la commessa
2. taksi-autoilija	2. office clerk	2. Angestellter/die Angestellte	2. l'impiegato
3. bussinkuljettaja	3. manager	3. der Bürokaufmann/ die Bürokauffrau	3. il manager
4. lentäjä	4. hairstylist	4. der Manager/ die Managerin	4. il parrucchiere
5. lentoemäntä/stuertti	5. barber	5. der Friseur/die Friseurin	5. il barbiere
6. tullivirkailija	6. doctor	6. der Arzt/die Ärztin	6. il dottore/la dottoressa
7. merikapteeni	7. nurse	7. der Krankenpfleger/die Krankenschwester	7. l'infermiere/l' infermiera
8. merimies	8. teacher	8. der Lehrer/die Lehrerin	8. l'insegnante
9. kuorma-autoilija	9. cashier	9. der Kassierer/die Kassiererin	9. il cassiere/la cassiera
10. poliisi	10. policeman/policewoman	10. der Polizist/die Polizistin	10. il poliziotto/la poliziotta
11. näyttelijä	11. actor/actress	11. der Schauspieler/die Schauspielerin	11. l'attore/l'attrice
12. muusikko	12. musician	12. der Musiker/die Musikerin	12. il musicista
13. rumpali	13. drummer	13. der Schlagzeuger/die Schlagzeugerin	13. il batterista
14. kitaristi	14. guitar player	14. der Gitarrist/die Gitarristin	14. il chitarrista
15. pianisti	15. pianist	15. der Pianist/die Pianistin	15. il pianista
16. laulaja	16. singer	16. der Sänger/die Sängerin	16. il cantante

 Käsityöt	 Crafts	 Handwerker	 Mestieri manuali
1. sähkömies	1. electrician	1. der Elektriker/die Elektrikerin	1. l'elettricista
2. moottorimekaniikka	2. motor mechanic	2. der Kfz-Mechaniker/die	2. il meccanico

Image 12. WordBox 30: Jobs (only 4 languages shown)

In Image 12, the languages are presented side-by-side, in thematical groups, with flags denoting the languages, and numbers to help locate the translations. The WordBox is linked to the text in the section in which the words in question appear, but it contains a significant number of words that do not appear in the text. The idea is to expand on the vocabulary from the basic expressions given in the text; in fact, for basic word-for-word translation, the exact translations of the dialogue texts

could be used instead of word lists. Every WordBox is supported by different types of exercises, mostly similar to those presented in the previous chapter on grammar.

5.5 Texts for reading: Stories

The Easy2 learning environment project started with the needs of the target group. It was considered a logical continuation to this ideal that a part of the contents would be created by members of the target group themselves. As stated in Dulay, Burt & Krashen (1982:28-29), language learners seem to prefer their peers as models for language learning and pronunciation, even above their teachers and parents. The group wanted to take advantage of this and present the learners with authentic material that would be in touch with the realities of the target group, and for this, a group of students from each partner school produced two dialogue texts, later to be renamed *Stories*, which would then be translated into all languages. All in all, the site would then contain 8 stories in 5 languages.

The role of English was twofold. There was no native English-speaking partner in the group, so all the English texts would be translated from other languages. English was also the *lingua franca* of the project, and it was agreed on that the English stories and activities would form the basis of the pedagogical approach, i.e. they would be written first, discussed by the entire group, and decisions made would be transferred into the stories and activities prepared by each of the partners. This was, naturally, the only reasonable approach since the partners had little knowledge of each other's native languages.

5.5.1 Content of Stories

The story texts were prepared within groups of students at each partnering institution. The themes were chosen based on the student's ideas, and teachers assisted them in writing the texts. The eight

final situations that were decided on were:

- Party with friends
- Shopping
- First day at work
- Arrival (in a new country/town)
- New phone
- Street food
- Accommodation
- Discotheque

The original texts were worked on and revised during nearly all of the project meetings. There were slight changes in the grammatical structures and vocabulary as seen fit by the group, but the idea was to maintain the original idea and content of the text.

5.5.2 Structure and lay-out

In the Berlin meeting in March 2003, the structure of the texts was under discussion. A four-part structure was decided on, consisting of an introduction, two parts with the actual situation, and an ending/good-bye part. This decision was based on both the technical and usability requirement of not having too much text on each page, and the intuitive decision to present texts in easy-to-follow segments. The four parts were seen to form an 'arc of drama' of sorts.

These parts would be displayed on separate pages in the environment, and each would be supported by an image. In Catania in May 2003, it was decided to use dedicated pictures drawn by a graphics artist instead of photographs or ready-made clipart images. This was seen to give the site a personal look and give a unique appearance to the characters appearing in the stories. Also, drawn images were seen to "age better" than photographs, which often show items and fashion from a certain point in time. Each of the characters had names that originated from the country which had

prepared the story in question. Image 13 presents an example.

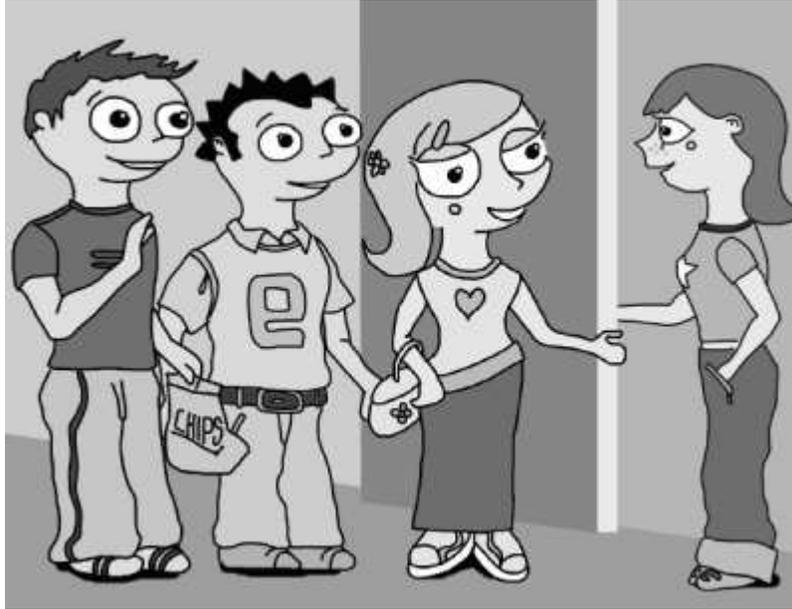


Image 13. Picture from story "Party with Friends".

5.5.3 Recording the texts

From very early on, it was decided that the texts would be recorded to support the written text. This was seen to support the reading of the texts in a meaningful way, give the site a more personal appearance through the involvement of students and provide benefits for language learning as well. Each country recorded all the stories in their own language, and the recording of the English texts was distributed between the countries. It was evident that this approach would result in heavy accentuation of the language recorded, as none of the speakers had native proficiency in English. This was, however, not considered a drawback. The environment was created from a multi-cultural starting point, and despite the requirement that all language presented must be grammatically correct, greater variation in pronunciation and accents would be allowed. This was seen to support

the autonomy and self esteem of the learners, showing that in fact, most English is spoken by non-native speakers and our cultural and language backgrounds are allowed to be visible in the language we use. Despite this, the recordings were not done half-heartedly; the idea was to achieve the highest level of language attainable.

The sounds were recorded in MP3 format. In the final version, students could listen to the text sentence by sentence as well as section by section. This was an approach clearly adopted from the "listen – pause – repeat" method often used in the language classroom. As there was no feasible way of providing computer feedback on repetition, the group wanted the students to have access to spoken examples in several ways.

5.5.4 Analysis of texts

After the student-written texts had reached a satisfactory level of grammatical correctness through iteration, they were analysed in terms of the grammatical elements and vocabulary they contained. A "working version" from this stage can be seen in Image 14.

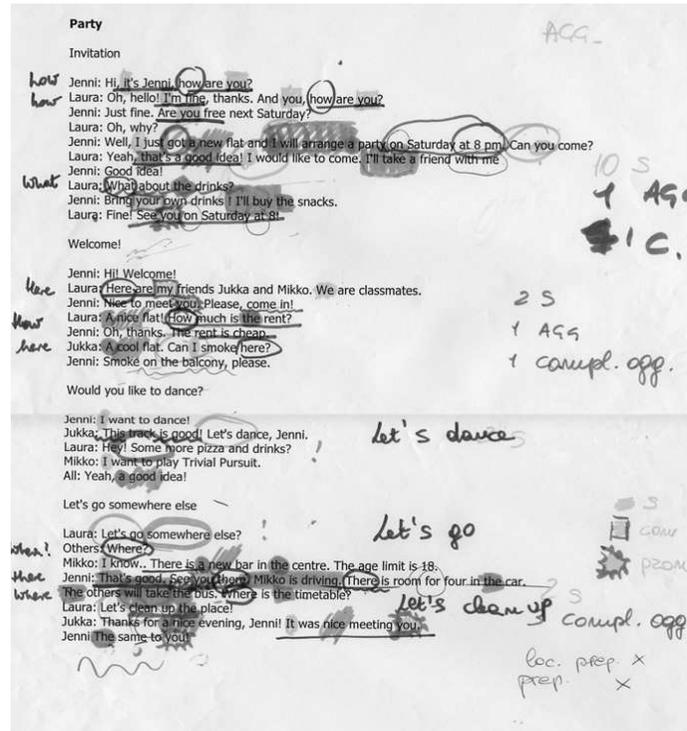


Image 14. Highlighted, early version of story "Party with friends"

The contents of the texts were categorised in order to discover the types of vocabulary and structures presented. These categories were then expanded to create the ToolBoxes and WordBoxes described above. The appropriate boxes were connected to the dialogue sections by means of links.

After these rounds of iteration, the texts had had their vocabulary and structures altered somewhat in terms of unification of words, the choice of certain vocabulary over others, the elimination of structures deemed too complicated, but the original, student-written content stayed essentially the same.

5.6 Communicative tools

One of the key ideas stemming from the theoretical framework was that the environment and all the

material should aim at being as communicative as possible. In an online environment, this has traditionally been difficult to achieve. The information is usually only presented one-way, i.e. the user reads what has been written, and cannot actively participate in creating new content. However, the requirements of experiential learning, the primary starting point for the project, state that instead of one-way reading, the learner should be involved in co-authoring, creation of new material that helps him/her take advantage of any language skills gathered and develop new ones (cf. Kohonen 2001: 56). Communication should therefore be encouraged starting from a very early level of language. To facilitate this, the material should be in touch with the realities of the user, because students have been shown to put more effort into studying something they perceive as important for their lives. The challenge, therefore, lies in promoting communication between learners of different backgrounds and very low language skills.

5.6.1 Communicative online features

If we take communicativeness to mean the opportunity to exchange ideas, meet people and create new meaning together, the Internet appears to be the perfect tool for that. There are thousands of online forums that promote different ideas, language learning included. However, relatively little has been done to actually approach this issue from a pedagogical standpoint. Many of the forums are simply set up, after which users are expected to log in and start posting messages. This may also work for a number of people, but the threshold for involving oneself into conversation with minimal language skills may be unsurpassable to anyone but the learners with the most self esteem. Looking at our target group, again, it is easy to argue that these learners may not have the motivation to simply start throwing ideas around with people from other countries, however much they would like to meet them.

In other words, there has to be a means of guiding learners into using the communication tools available. The Easy2 project approached this issue by including several different types of tools in the environment, and creating activities that guide learners into using the tools – starting from very simple “learning through Copy and Paste” exercises.

5.6.2 Chat and ShoutBox

Already at the start of the project, it was decided that the final environment should have some sort of chat functionality. This was more of an intuitive selection than an educated one, since most websites had some sort of a chat and this appeared to be popular with students – thus, it was also considered a good way of bringing people to the website. However, once learning theory was introduced as the basis of the project, the chat presented itself as both an opportunity and a potential threat to the learning process. It was an easily approachable, yet sufficiently unique way of meeting people from other countries, but it also had to be carefully guided in order not to become a monolingual meeting point for people from the same country. In other words, the group was trying to create meaning in Internet chat discussions, which is no easy feat in itself.

A chat is a real-time situation. If you are too slow to respond, your conversation may be lost in the exchange going on in the chat, or your partner may become frustrated. This may often be the case when you are trying to learn a new language and have a conversation in it. Also, in order for the conversation and situation to be meaningful, you need to have a partner online all the time, and look at the chat window constantly. In a classroom context, this may not be easy to arrange. This is why the group looked for a tool that would allow for the students to, simply, shout out things to each other while visiting the site, and have “near real-time” conversations while they were doing the exercises. A PostNuke CMS add-on module called ShoutBox appeared to provide the answer

(Image 15).



Image 15. ShoutBox.

With the ShoutBox, users can “shout” simple sentences to each other by writing their message and clicking on “Shout”. The shouts are recorded in a text file that stores a certain number of lines, so the user can scroll back to the previous shouts if needed. The ShoutBox is visible all the time and refreshes every few seconds, or whenever a new page is loaded.

The actual chat functionality, utilising a dedicated window and program, were created on the basis of the IRC (Internet Relay Chat) network. The user connects to the network using a Java applet in their browser. This was seen to allow for easier moderation of the chat when required, and for developers and other individuals to be present more often, using a dedicated piece of IRC software, without the need for the browser applet.

5.6.7 Discussion forum

Since the PostNuke system included a ready-made discussion forum, this was set up to provide the

users with a non-linear means of communication. In a discussion forum, posts stay visible for an indefinite period of time, and users may take as long as they want to write their reply.

During the project meetings, the group decided on several discussion areas to be added into the site, in all the project languages. However, they were not completed prior to the official launch of the site.

6. Evaluation of environment features

6.1 Experiential learning principles

As the principles of experiential learning, open dialogue and authenticity were chosen as the primary building blocks of the environment, the evaluation must also focus on these features and how they were preserved in the final product.

The dialogue texts, as prepared by the students, were based on actual real-life situations. The iteration carried out by the project group and the implementation on the site has not changed the basic contents significantly, even though individual words or sentences have undergone changes. The recording of the texts in actual, accentuated language by students from different countries made them appear rather authentic.

Even so, there is no way to quantitatively measure that the texts are - or were - directly in touch with the realities of the learners, or whether this was merely an implication. An unfortunate translation error in the questionnaire designed for the test user group in May 2004 (Ala-Kutsi 2004) prevents us from examining the results - and even then, the group studied would be very small and represent only one language group. Also, it can be argued that the texts, apart from a few differing themes (some of which would even be considered unsuitable for traditional textbooks, such as mentions of smoking and alcohol use), are indistinguishable from textbook-style language learning material. The students, while creating them, have been in a mindset to produce "learning material" for students, and this has been further iterated by the repeated analysis and modification rounds carried out by the project group. Also, there is no real data available on how much the students were guided, and to which direction, while preparing the material.

What was constructed around the texts, again, carries no implication of being prepared by

students themselves. They were designed by experienced language teachers, who were used to their own traditions despite being committed to the ideas of experiential learning within the project group. This can be seen in the way the different *Boxes* were constructed - initial versions carry a very heavy grammatical load of terminology and traditional text-book like repetition.

Aside from the grammar, vocabulary and exercises, discussed in detail below, the environment aimed to embrace experiential learning in the entire approach. Constructing the environment around a "language learning town" was one way of supporting this idea. The technical skills of the group and the choice of environment placed a number of limitations on this approach, producing an outcome which can be seen as a compromise between the goals of the pedagogical theory and the technical reality of the content management system.

6.2 ToolBoxes

The obvious question arising when one looks, on one hand, at the development process of the ToolBox and the "no traditional grammar" goal set by the group, and on the other hand, at the final ToolBoxes and their activities, is whether or not the goal materialised, and if the final result truly presents a different approach to teaching and learning grammar.

The difficulty of restraining oneself from using traditional grammatical vocabulary cannot be stressed enough. It is evident throughout the development process and can be clearly seen in the end result. Even now, as the environment is in a very nearly completed state, words like 'adjective' pop up as exercise titles after several rounds of error correction and revision. All the people involved in the creation of the material had teacher backgrounds and were highly familiar with the tradition of grammar teaching and drill exercises. In itself, an attempt to differ from the norm by creating grammar teaching material including neither meta-language nor first language translations

was a bold move.

It has to be said, however, that visual clues with structures has been done before. A similar approach is seen, for example, in a number of television language teaching programmes which are usually monolingual to a large extent.

The key innovation, on the other hand, is in the way grammar structures are chosen. The starting point is in the texts, not vice versa. It can be argued that, whenever there is a clear syllabus for study, the topics to be dealt with should be pre-determined and texts chosen to support them, but the opposite way places the emphasis on the communicative aspect of the language. The target group is interested in learning the language they need to convey messages in everyday situations, and the dialogues prepared by other students in co-operation with their teachers provide them with these situations and phrases. The students themselves were the best way for the group to discover what the students wanted, and their needs were taken into account to a large extent as the story texts were used as the basis for grammatical instruction. As the name suggests, the ToolBox is a set of tools for them to construct new personally meaningful utterances.

6.3 Activities

The Hot Potatoes exercises would appear to work against much of what has been chosen as the project framework. Even though there are some more communicative examples, the bulk of the activities are the type of cloze-filling and multiple choice that language learners and teachers are more than familiar with. It is of course understandable that the re-innovation and/or re-writing of all of the material and creation of new software would have been beyond reasonable bounds in terms of group resources and technical expertise.

Despite the obvious drawbacks of the Hot Potatoes exercises presented above, initial results

received from a single-class test of the environment (Ala-Kutsi 2004) would seem to serve as evidence that the exercises on offer are appealing to the target group, and perhaps even more different from school books than one would assume, especially in the context of the above-mentioned restrictions. The two tables below present partial findings from this study:

[Questionnaire item] 4. The exercises on the site are different than in school books.

<i>All</i>		<i>Group I</i>		<i>Group II</i>		<i>Group III</i>		<i>Group IV</i>	
<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>
31 (77,5%)	9 (22,5%)	7	0	11	4	4	4	9	1

5. I liked doing the exercises on the site.

<i>All</i>		<i>Group I</i>		<i>Group II</i>		<i>Group III</i>		<i>Group IV</i>	
<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>
36 (90%)	4 (10%)	7	0	14	1	7	1	8	2

This may be partially explained by the fact that the Internet in itself was a rather new medium for the target group, and it presents itself favourably to the study group in this respect.

The DiaryBox, which was designed to be a "more communicative" exercise than the traditional Hot Potatoes, has not reached popularity. In April 2007, there are a total of 12 active DiaryBoxes, of which 6 are created by the site administrators. Only 2 DiaryBoxes have been updated since 2005 - both by site administrators. As a salvaging feature, all DiaryBoxes that did contain anything were related to the prepared activities.

Mission: Easytown is an appealing game for the target audience. It manages to disguise well the fact that it consists of multiple-choice and right and wrong answers. However, as the game is a

by-product of the process rather than an end in itself, and designed by members of the IT group, it has not been analysed according to the theoretical guidelines, nor discussed within the group. This amounts to certain features the language teachers may not have agreed on: for example, the game displays grammatically incorrect sentences as multiple choice options, which was not a consciously chosen approach.

6.4 WordBoxes

As presented above, vocabulary acquisition is a problematic area of research. It is also an area where personal preference and experience usually takes precedence over exact scientific study. Krantz (1991:16) appears to confirm this by stating that much of the research on mono and bilingual wordlists seems to spring from what persons have intuitively felt to be the best way of learning language.

A clear strength for the approach adapted by the project was, as can be seen above, that the intuition of the people involved was not the deciding factor in the selection of methods. Different prototypes were prepared and select features from their contents were combined in the final version.

Multi-lingual WordBoxes were chosen based on the assumption that monolingual descriptions would be too hard for the target group to understand. Also, the group wanted to present learners with the opportunity to compare languages and maybe acquire words in multiple languages, or gain benefit from the similarity of their first language with the target language. Interference between languages was not considered a major problem at A1 level; rather, the group wanted to present the learner with any available leverage from their first language, or any second language they may have.

Krantz's study results (1991:129) seem to confirm the assumption. Based on his research, beginners with little or no knowledge of the target language will not benefit from using a monolingual dictionary.

In the final version of the learning environment, a search functionality was added to the WordBoxes, with an interface visible at the top of the screen at all times. This supports Krantz's *READ-LOOK-UP* method described above, as students can search for words on the go. According to Krantz, this strategy is quantitatively as effective, or even more effective, than the *READ-ONLY* strategy where meaning is deduced from the surrounding context. In his study, the *READ-LOOK-UP* group scored slightly higher in post-reading tests and knew more words (22 out of 148 words not learned by latter, 30 by former) (Krantz 1991:82). When dealing with Krantz's results, however, it must be noted that the group studied was not similar to the Easy2 target group.

However, as vocabulary acquisition is nearly always a combination of strategies, it is noteworthy that there is nothing preventing the user from utilising the *READ-ONLY* learning strategy in acquiring basic vocabulary from the texts. The stories are in easy-to-follow dialogue format, with recorded audio to support them, and the meanings of most words can be deduced from the immediate context. The WordBoxes are accessible, via the search and link functionalities, but explicit, word-for-word translations of the same texts are not visible. They can, if required, be accessed by the flag icons at the bottom of the page.

6.5 Communicative tools

The extensive communication tools constructed for the environment have also proven to be the least used and most problematic.

In April 2007, the Chat functionality is essentially empty of visitors. I monitored it very

closely between 2005 and the end of 2006, only meeting occasional passers-by and university students who were using the site for different research purposes. The following presents an example from April 2005:

```
Apr 23 12:56:07 <rdebski> hi, all
Apr 23 12:56:30 <^Mikko^> Hi
Apr 23 12:57:12 <rdebski> mikko, what language are you learning now?
Apr 23 12:57:26 <^Mikko^> Well actually, I'm one of the creators of this site
Apr 23 12:57:38 <^Mikko^> I just keep this chat open in case someone shows
up
Apr 23 12:57:49 <rdebski> nice to meet you then
Apr 23 12:58:04 <^Mikko^> Same to you
Apr 23 12:58:13 <^Mikko^> All the way from Australia?
Apr 23 12:58:25 <rdebski> I am a Master by research student in education, yes!
Apr 23 12:58:41 <rdebski> in Melbourne
Apr 23 12:58:45 <^Mikko^> Interesting
```

(source: logfiles for #easy2 on my personal computer)

There were a few similar dialogues between myself and a site user during this time, but very little or no interaction between students from different countries. This seems to suggest that there was too little guidance available to use the Chat tool, and learners from different countries are very seldom present in the environment at the same time. Apparently, the example lessons presented in the manuals have not been made available well enough for teachers and students to discover them without assistance.

The ShoutBox fares only slightly better. There is some sort of exchange going on, although it can be argued that it has little to do with the site contents:

proba-03:53pm
hello :) :)

L33TH4X-10:44am
IM IN YER ACOUNT

anaalilyyli-10:44am
okeim, voit sanoo mua eino grööniks

skeletor-10:43am
MEIKÄ ON ANAALIKEISARI

pilluboi-10:43am
et kai sää vitun neliraajavammanen valas oo tosissas

He-man-10:43am
OON HEEMAN

(source: copy of www.easy2.org ShoutBox on April 8th, 2007)

Exercises were created for the use of the ShoutBox to lower the threshold of learners posting content on the site. Indeed, there seems to be no threshold in what learners are posting, but the quality of the content leaves a lot to be desired. As a positive remark, the site seems to be attracting some users, even if they stay around only to post garbage in the ShoutBox.

The most problematic aspect is the Forum. Since the final area division was left incomplete, there were only two publicly available areas: Town Square, for general chat, and Stories, for discussion on the Story texts. These did not invite any kind of discussion during the first months of the environment's existence.

Unfortunately, these message areas were soon discovered by bulk message posting robots advertising pornography, herbal medicine and other questionable services (Image 16). As the

project is long past funding, there was nobody to appoint to take care of the problem in terms of altering the program code. Thus, the only feasible solution was to add an automatic "forum pruning" function, deleting every post older than 30 days. Since there are no actual user messages to speak of, this mainly serves to remove the junk mail postings. For educational purposes, the forum has no use at the time of writing, and it was closed in the beginning of May 2007.



Image 16. *www.easy2.org* Forum on April 8th 2007.

7. Conclusions

Based on my involvement in the Easy2 project and the analysis of the project goals, the Easy2 project has achieved some of its goals, while falling short on others.

The founding principles of experiential learning have been preserved to a certain degree in the final result. The pedagogical principles chosen could be seen as ambitious, and indeed, it is easy to argue that not all of the goals laid out by them have been met. However, when viewed objectively, the site does present a number of features that have been unavailable in past language learning websites. The inclusion of the DiaryBox and creation of supporting activities were in many ways closest to a guided, electronic portfolio that the group had seen up to the point where the environment was introduced.

In as much as possible using the chosen technology, the environment tries to encourage learning from experience and learning from real life situations. The texts and exercises have their motivation in using language to support everyday activities, in accordance with the level of language set out in the framework for language learning. A lot of the activities presented do not rely on traditional error correction, but try to give the user the freedom to use language in a communicative context. Efforts have been made to make the contents appealing to the target group, and several functionalities have been put in place to serve authentic communication on the website. The sheer amount of material on the site is remarkable, all languages combined it amounts to thousands of pages of texts and exercises. Small extras such as the Mission:Easytown game have been included to draw the user in.

Perhaps the strongest part of the theory that materialises in the environment is indeed the Monitor Model. Although not decided on officially, the group seem to have maintained a rather

close understanding of how language is chosen and presented to the users of the environment, and this seems to match Krashen's principles closely. The key is to be communicative and focus on the message rather than correctness, allowing for the users to experience feelings of success while they slowly develop their language skills. The only place where this approach does not completely come to life are the Hot Potatoes exercises.

However, whereas the Easy2 learning environment may be seen to carry over the theoretical foundations rather well, it has not succeeded as a website. The amount of user registrations is very low, less than 1 new user per day since the introduction of the site. Since a lot of the features offered do require users to register, this is an indication of the way the pages are used. This dearth of users has also caused many of the problems with the communicative tools (junk mail, inappropriate messages, no users in Chat).

The expertise of the group in implementing the website from a technical point of view should have been more extensive, and indeed, separate individuals with a professional background in website design and programming should have been appointed to handle the construction of the environment, leaving the rest of the project group to maintain pedagogical and linguistic coherence of the material. This could have resulted in the selection of a more feasible technical backbone for the environment. The postNuke system, while free, open source and expandable, was not the best choice for a website such as Easy2. However, at the time this became evident, there was already too little time to make a radical change in the approach. The problem of postNuke is that it has too many unnecessary features - indeed, a lot of the time spent making corrections based on the usability report had to do with altering the postNuke functionalities. Now, since the system has been modified so extensively, it can no longer be updated to a later version, probably providing better safety against junk mail posting and other related problems. The site has also been

unavailable for certain periods of time due to malicious "crackers" using a security vulnerability in postNuke to crash the CMS.

Also, the launch of the site should have taken place more visibly, with more coverage on the Internet. While there was an international launch event in Tampere in January 2005, the visitors received little hands-on experience. The group planned to have a coordinated session where learners from different countries would have been present on the site at the same time, but this did not materialise. Having such a session would have greatly boosted the communicative aspects of the site, as it would have demonstrated the abilities of the collaboration tools made available. The site has not been systematically listed in directories of language learning sites, and finding it on the Google search engine is difficult due to the fairly commonly-used name "Easy2".

The main achievement of Easy2, and indeed one of its purposes, was to be a proving ground for how to implement different pedagogical approaches in an interactive learning environment. The result was destined from the beginning to be a compromise between the technical framework, pedagogical goals and project resources. Considering all these factors, the product in itself turned out feasible, but problems occurred in the finalisation and dissemination phases.

References

Ala-Kutsi, Henna. 2004. *Easy 2 Test Report*. Pro Seminar Thesis. Unpublished.

Arneil, Stewart, Holmes, Martin & Street, Hilary. 2001 "Review of Hot Potatoes". In *Language Learning & Technology*, Vol. 5, No.2. [Internet] Available from: <http://llt.msu.edu/vol5num2/review3/default.html>
[Accessed 9th April 2007]

Buber, Martin. 1938. *I and Thou*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd.

Council of Europe. *What is Lingua 2?* [Internet] Available from:
<http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/socrates/lingua/lingua2_en.html>
[Accessed 9th April 2007]

Council of Europe, Language Policy Division. 2001. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*. [Internet] Available from:
<http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf>
[Accessed 9th April 2007]

Dewey, John. 1938. *Experience and education*. London: Collier Macmillan.

Dulay, Heidi, Burt, Marina & Krashen, Stephen. 1982. *Language Two*. New York: Oxford University Press.

English-language Wikipedia. *Experiential learning*. [Internet] Available from:
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Experiential_learning>
[Accessed 9th April 2007]

Haley, Marjorie Hall & Rentz, Patricia. 2002. *Applying SLA Research and Theory to Practice: What Can a Teacher Do?* [Internet] Available from:

<<http://www-writing.berkeley.edu/TESL-EJ/ej20/a2.html>>

[Accessed 9th April 2007]

Jaatinen, Riitta & Lehtovaara, Jorma. 2005. "Kielenoppimisen ohjaaminen Toisen pedagogisena kohtaamisena." In *Arviointi autenttisemmaksi - Kieltenopettajien kertomuksia opetuksen ja arvioinnin kehittämisestä*, ed. Riitta Jaatinen & Jorma Lehtovaara. Tampere: Pirkanmaan ammattikorkeakoulu.

Kaikkonen, Pauli. 2005. "Kokemus ja kohtaaminen kielikasvatuksen lähtökohtina". In *Osaaminen ja kokemus*, ed. Esa Poikela. Tampere: Tampere University Press.

Kelly, G. 1955. *The psychology of personal constructs*. New York: Norton.

Kohonen, Viljo. 1986. "Kokonaisvaltaisesta vieraan kielen alkeisoppimisesta". In *Näkökulmia kokonaisvaltaiseen oppimiseen I - Äidinkielen ja englannin ala-asteen opetuskokeilun lähtökohtia*, ed. Viljo Kohonen and Jorma Lehtovaara. Tampere: Tampereen yliopiston jäljennepalvelu.

Kohonen, Viljo. 2001. "Towards experiential foreign language education". In *Experiential Learning in Foreign Language Education*, ed. Viljo Kohonen, Riitta Jaatinen, Pauli Kaikkonen and Jorma Lehtovaara. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.

Kohonen, Viljo. 2005a. "Experiential learning, intercultural learning and teacher development in foreign language education." In *Multicultural communities, multilingual practice = Monikulttuuriset yhteisöt, monikielinen käytäntö : Festschrift für Annikki Koskensalo zum 60. Geburtstag*, eds. John Smeds et al. Turku: Turku University Press.

Kohonen, Viljo. 2005b. "The Common European Framework and the Language Portfolio as a challenge for developing FL education." *Panorama 1/2005, Schola Europea, Brussels*, 18–27

Kohonen, Viljo, Korhonen, Vesa, Ahonen, Mikko, Syvänen, Antti, Tolkki, Lauri. 2006. "Life-wide Professional Learning: Bridging Education and Working Life." Awaiting publication.

Krantz, Gösta. 1991. *Learning Vocabulary in a Foreign Language - A Study of Reading Strategies*. Gothenburg: Minab.

Krashen, Stephen D. 1982. *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Krashen, Stephen D. & Terrell, Tracy D. 1983. *The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Lehtovaara, Jorma. 1986. "Ihmiskäsitys kokonaisvaltaista oppimista edistävässä kasvatuksessa." In *Näkökulmia kokonaisvaltaiseen oppimiseen I - Äidinkielen ja englannin ala-asteen opetuskokeilun lähtökohtia*, ed. Viljo Kohonen and Jorma Lehtovaara. Tampere: Tampereen yliopiston jäljennepalvelu.

Lehtovaara, Jorma. 1994. "Dialogisuus, reflektointi ja ihmisen maailmassa oleminen." In *Dialogissa osa 1 - matkalla mahdollisuuteen*, ed. Jorma Lehtovaara and Riitta Jaatinen. Tampere: Tampereen yliopiston jäljennepalvelu.

Lehtovaara, Jorma. 1996. "Dialogissa - Kokonaisena ihmisenä avoimessa yhteydessä toiseen." In *Dialogissa osa 2 - ihmisenä ihmisyhteisössä*, ed. Jorma Lehtovaara and Riitta Jaatinen. Tampere: Tampereen yliopiston jäljennepalvelu.

Lehtovaara, Jorma. 2001. "What is it - (FL) teaching?". In *Experiential Learning in Foreign Language Education*, ed. Viljo Kohonen, Riitta Jaatinen, Pauli Kaikkonen and Jorma Lehtovaara. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.

Lewin, Kurt. 1951. *Field theory in social sciences*. New York: Harper & Row.

Mitchell, Rosamond & Myles, Florence. 1998. *Second Language Learning Theories*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

postNuke Developers. *What is postNuke?* [Internet] Available from:
<<http://news.postnuke.com/Sections-article25-p1.html>>

[Accessed September 2005]

Rogers, Carl. 1975. "The interpersonal relationship in the facilitation of learning". In *Humanistic*

education sourcebook, ed. Read D, Simon S. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Stevens, Peggy Walker - Richards, Anthony. 1992. "Changing Schools through Experiential Education".

ERIC Digest 1992-03-00. [Internet] Available from:

<<http://www.ericdigests.org/1992-3/changing.htm>>

[Accessed April 9th 2007]

Tampereen Yliopiston Tietojenkäsittelytieteiden laitos. 2004. *Easy 2 asiantuntija-arviointi*. Unpublished.

Värri, Veli-Matti. 1997. *Hyvä kasvatus - kasvatus hyvään*. Tampere: Tampere University Press.

Personal notes on Easy2 project meetings. 2003-2005.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Easy 2 Student Manual

Appendix 2: Easy 2 Teacher Manual

Easy 2 Student Manual

Version 1.0

Jan 27th, 2005

Author: Mikko Heinonen, mikko.heinonen@easy2.org

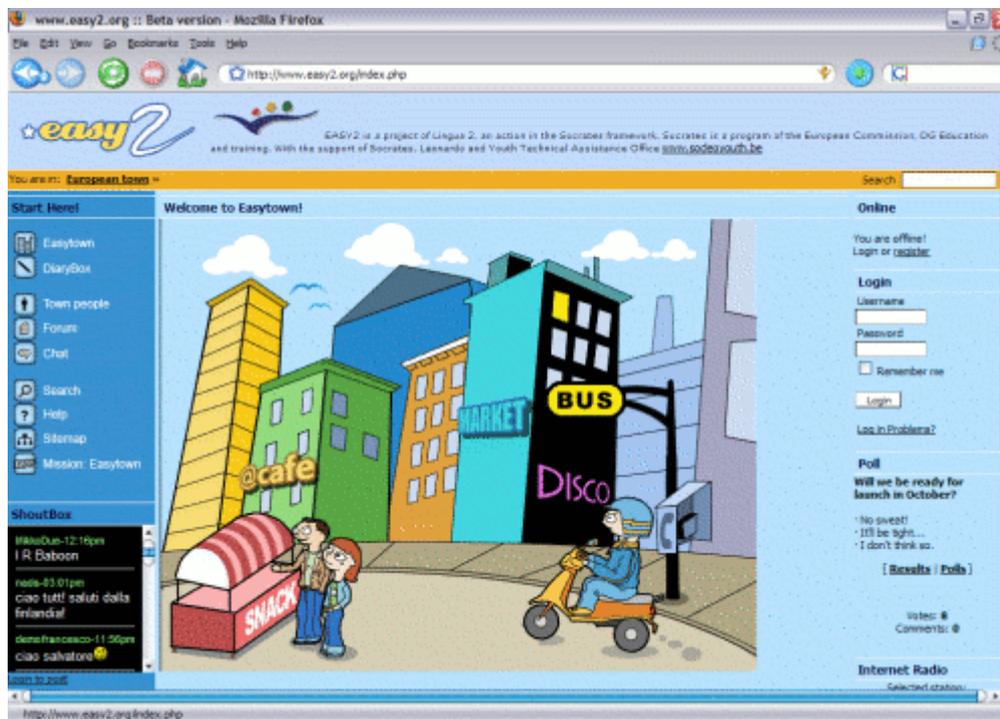


Welcome to Easytown!

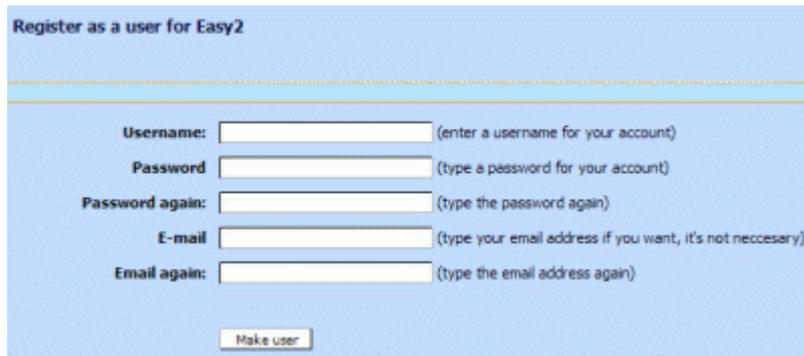
Hello, and welcome to learn languages in Easytown. This is your guide to using the www.easy2.org website.

1. Registering your username

The first thing to do once you arrive in Easytown is to get your own place. For this, you need to **register**.



Click on "**Register**" on the main page. You will be taken to the New User page.



Register as a user for Easy2

Username: (enter a username for your account)

Password (type a password for your account)

Password again: (type the password again)

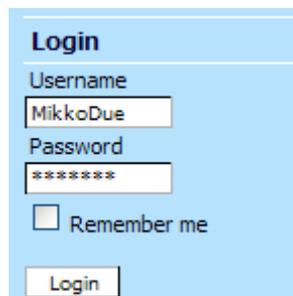
E-mail (type your email address if you want, it's not necessary)

Email again: (type the email address again)

Choose a name that you like, and a password that you can remember but others can't easily guess. **You need to type the same password again in "Password Again"**. If you have an email address, you can write it here. It is not needed. **Type the same email address again in "Email again"**.

Then click "Make user".

Now you are one of the people in Easytown! Use your name and password to **Log In**.



Login

Username

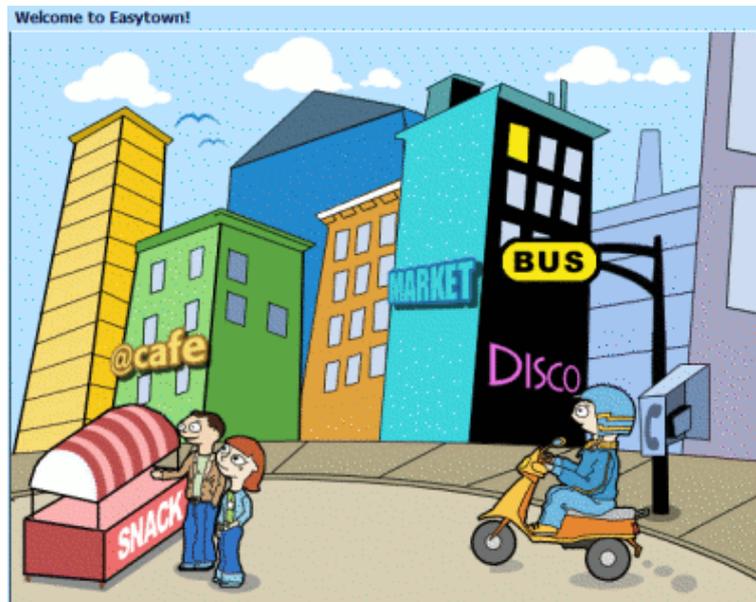
Password

Remember me

2. Moving around in Easytown

Reading Stories

Once you have logged in, you can explore the image of Easytown. In the picture, there are spots that change when you put the mouse pointer over them. These places are links to the different **Stories**.



You can also use the links below the picture to access the different stories:

[Party with friends](#) [First day at work](#) [Shopping](#) [Arrival](#) [Accomodation](#) [Discotheque](#) [Phone](#) [Street food](#)

Click on the top left window on the block of flats. You will be taken to the story "**Party with Friends**".

Party with friends - English
Page 1 of 4
Invitation

Jesse Hi, it's Jesse, how are you?
Laara Oh, hello! I'm fine, thanks. And you, how are you?
Jesse Just fine. Are you free next Saturday?
Laara Oh, why?
Jesse Well, I just got a new flat and I will arrange a party on Saturday at 8 pm. Can you come?
Laara Yeah, that's a good idea! I would like to come. I'll take a friend with me.
Jesse Good idea!
Laara What about the address?
Jesse Bring your own drink! I'll buy the snacks.
Laara Fine! See you on Saturday at 8!
Listen to the whole text

Finland France Germany Italy

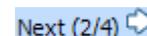
Here you can see the story. This story is in English. If you want to read it in another language, click on the **Flags** at the bottom of the page.



You can read and listen to the story at the same time. Use the **Play** button to start playing sound. You can pause the sound with the **Pause** button.



Each story is in **four parts**. To go from one part to another, use the **arrow buttons**.



To return to the town image at any time, click on "Easytown" in the left menu.



3. Looking at Wordboxes and Toolboxes, doing activities

At the bottom of each page, you see a picture of a head. This link takes you to the **Activity Index**.

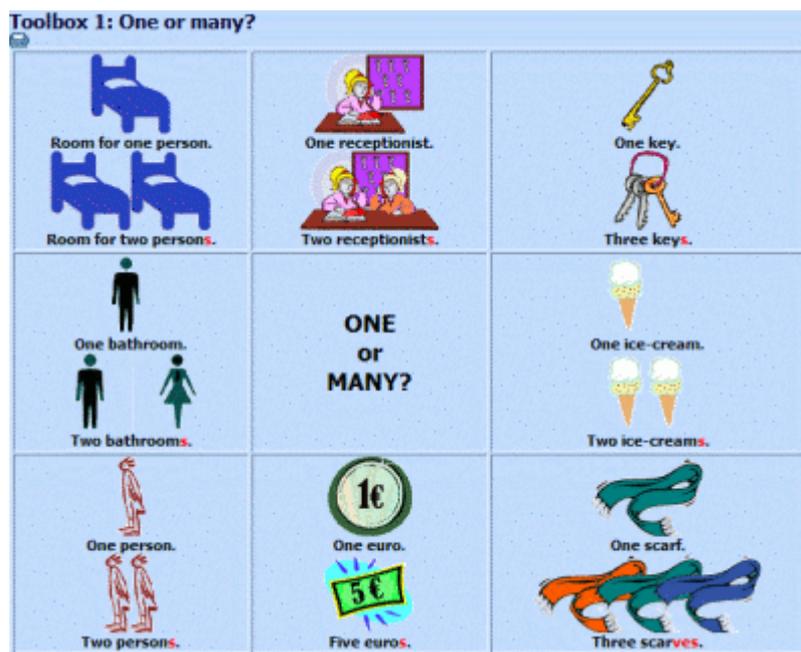


In this index, all the different **Wordboxes, Toolboxes, Diaryboxes, Shoutboxes and activities** are listed.

A **Wordbox** is a list of words that have to do with the same things as the Story. The words are listed in all five languages, and they have numbers that help you find the right word.

Wordbox 21: Days and Months				
DAYS AND MONTHS				
🇫🇮	🇬🇧	🇩🇪	🇮🇹	🇫🇷
PÄIVÄT	DAYS	DIE TAGE	GIORNI	LES JOURS
1. maanantai	1. Monday	1. der Montag	1. # Lunedì	1. Lundi
2. tiistai	2. Tuesday	2. der Dienstag	2. # Martedì	2. Mardi
3. keskiviikko	3. Wednesday	3. der Mittwoch	3. # Mercoledì	3. Mercredi
4. torstai	4. Thursday	4. der Donnerstag	4. # Giovedì	4. Jeudi
5. perjantai	5. Friday	5. der Freitag	5. # Venerdì	5. Vendredi
6. lauantai	6. Saturday	6. der Samstag	6. # Sabato	6. Samedi
7. sunnuntai	7. Sunday	7. der Sonntag	7. # Domenica	7. Dimanche
8. tänään	8. today	8. heute	8. oggi	8. Aujourd'hui
9. eilen	9. yesterday	9. gestern	9. ieri	9. Hier
10. toissapäivänä	10. the day before yesterday	10. vorgestern	10. l'altro ieri	10. Avant-hier
11. huomenna	11. tomorrow	11. morgen	11. domani	11. Demain
12. viikossa	12. the day after tomorrow	12. übermorgen	12. dopodomani	12. Après-demain
14. viikonloppu	14. the day after tomorrow	14. die Woche	14. la settimana	14. la semaine
15. viikottain	15. week	15. die Wochenende	15. il fine settimana (settimanalmente)	15. Le week-end
	14. weekend	15. wöchentlich		15. Hebdomadaire (chaque semaine)
	15. weekly			

A **Toolbox** tells you how to say things in the language you are learning. Look at the pictures and examples.



Diaryboxes are where you get to write things in your own DiaryBox. Read on for an explanation of how to use the DiaryBox.

DiaryBox 11 - Party invitation

English: Write an invitation to a party in your DiaryBox!

German: Write an invitation to a party in your DiaryBox!

In **Shoutboxes** you say things to the other people in Easytown. They give you instructions on what to say.

ShoutBox 1 - Hello!

English: Go to the ShoutBox and say hello to someone!

German: Gehe zur ShoutBox und sage zu irgend jemanden Hallo!

French: Va à la ShoutBox et dis salut à quelqu'un !

Italian: Vai allo ShoutBox e manda un saluto!

Finnish: Mene ShoutBoxiin ja sano jollekin hei!

Activities

There are many different types of activities for you to do. They use words from the Stories, Toolboxes and Wordboxes. It is a good idea to take a look at the Toolboxes and Wordboxes before you try to do the activities.

In all the activities, there are a few things that are the same.

You can click **Check** to see if your answer is correct.

If you click **Hint**, the activity will help you, but you will not get a perfect score.

Complete sentences

Lauri's story

"Check" will show you if your answers are correct.
"Hint" will help you but will take away points.
Use these words:

bedrooms big sister block of flats computer sisters divorced floor house listen pets

My name is Lauri.
I'm sixteen years old.
I live in a _____ with my mother and two _____.
Our apartment is on the 7th _____.
There are three _____ in our flat.
My father has his own flat, because my parents are _____.
I have two _____: a cat and a dog. My cat is called Mirri and the dog is Musti.
In the evenings I watch tv and _____ to music.

In this activity, you must **write the words** from the box in the **white gaps** inside the text.

Match words

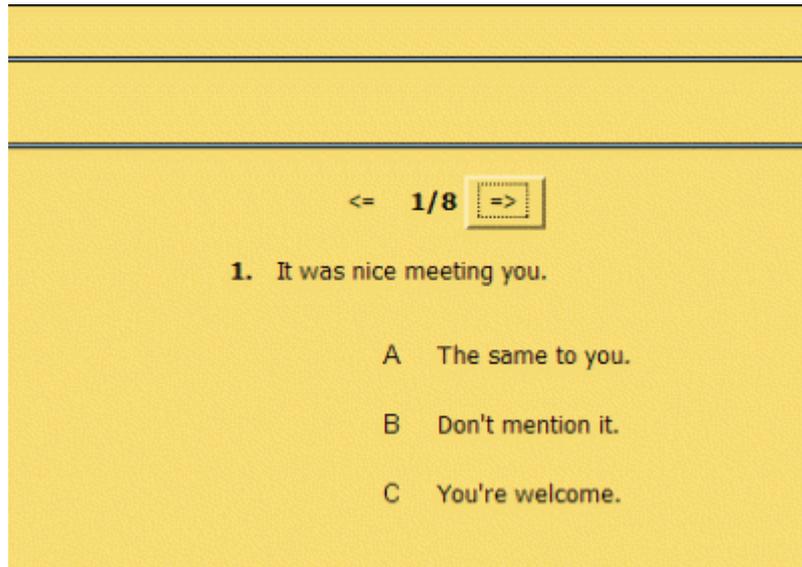
Drag from right to left with your mouse to match!

Check

Hi, how are you?	Just fine, thanks.	Yes, I can.
Here are my friends Jukka and Mikko.		You are welcome.
Can you come?		Bye bye.
I want to dance.		Yeah, a good idea.
It was nice meeting you.		Nice to meet you.
I want to play Trivial Pursuit.		The same to you.
Thank you for a nice evening.		Let's dance.
Goodbye, girls.		

In this activity, **use your mouse** to bring items from the right to the left, next to the correct answers, like in the picture above.

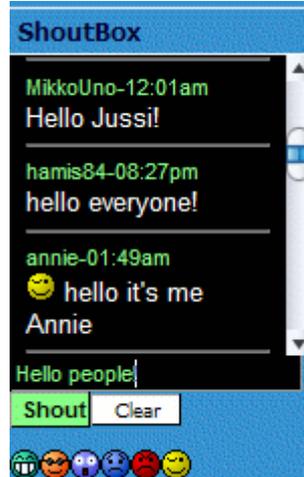
ABC



Look at the question or sentence. Choose **A**, **B**, or **C** to answer. Use the => key to move to the next question.

4. Using the ShoutBox and DiaryBox

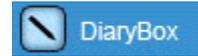
In the **ShoutBox**, you can send messages to other users of the site.



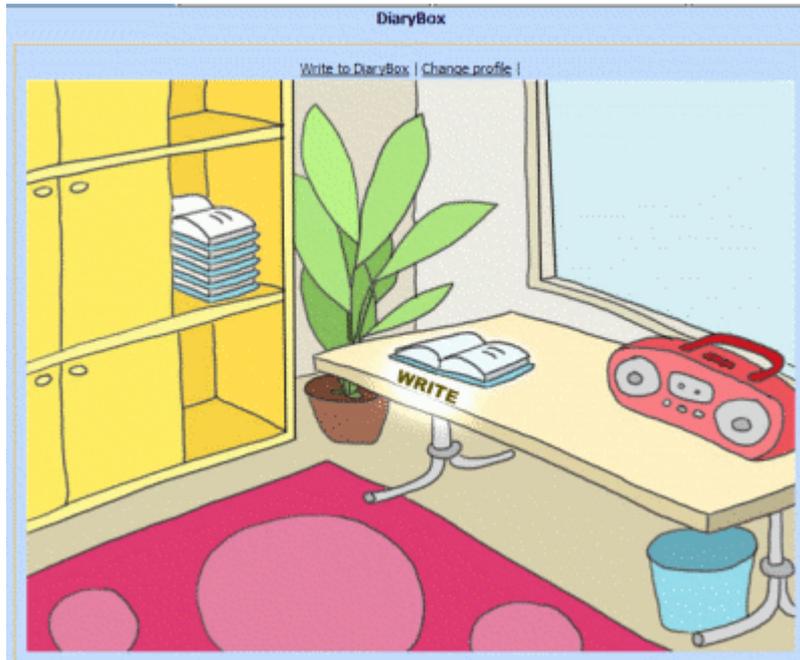
Write your message on the bottom line, then click **Shout** to send it! If you don't want to send anything, click **Clear**. To add a smiley face, just click on them.

You can see the ShoutBox all the time on the left. You must be **logged in** to use it.

You can find the **DiaryBox** in the left menu under this button:



The DiaryBox is your own place. You can write your diary, read what you have written, listen to the radio or change your settings here. Just **move your mouse** over the picture and click to select.



If you want to write in your diary, click on the **book on the table** and the write window loads. You need to **scroll the screen** to see it.

New DiaryBox entry for MikkoDue

Title

Body text

Shown to

Image/Media Data

Upload a new media file

Use file

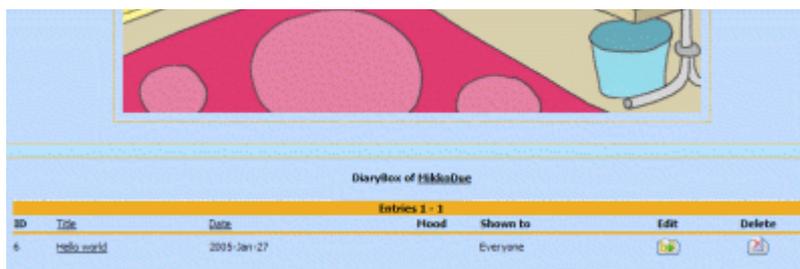
When writing, you must give your text a **Title**. Then write what you want in **Body Text**.

You can choose who can see your DiaryBox texts. In **Shown to**, you can choose **Everyone**, **Teachers only** or **Me only**. If you choose **Me only**, only you can see the text.

If you want to add a picture, you can use the **Image Data** window. Click **Browse** to select a picture to add from your computer.

When your text is ready, click **Create** to save it.

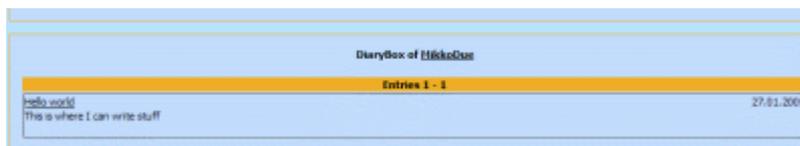
To read your **DiaryBox** entries click on the **books in the cupboard**. The list will appear, **scroll down to see it**.



The screenshot shows the top part of the DiaryBox interface. At the top, there is a decorative header with a pink and yellow pattern and a blue bucket. Below this, the text "DiaryBox of HikkoDoe" is centered. Underneath, there is a yellow bar with the text "Entries 1 - 1". Below that is a table with the following columns: ID, Title, Date, Hood, Shown to, Edit, and Delete. The table contains one entry with ID 6, Title "hello world", Date "2005-Jan-27", Hood, Shown to "Everyone", and Edit and Delete icons.

ID	Title	Date	Hood	Shown to	Edit	Delete
6	hello world	2005-Jan-27		Everyone		

Click on the title of an entry to see it. You can also **edit** or **delete** entries here.



The screenshot shows the DiaryBox interface with a single entry selected. The entry title "hello world" is highlighted in blue. Below the title, the text "This is where I can write stuff" is visible. On the right side, the date "27.01.2005" is displayed.

ID	Title	Date
6	hello world	27.01.2005

If you click on **the cupboard door** you can change your settings, like your name and password, or enter more information about yourself (email address, MSN Messenger, ICQ number, location).

5. Using the Chat and the Forum

The **Chat** lets you talk to other people in real time. Click on Chat in the menu to start the program.

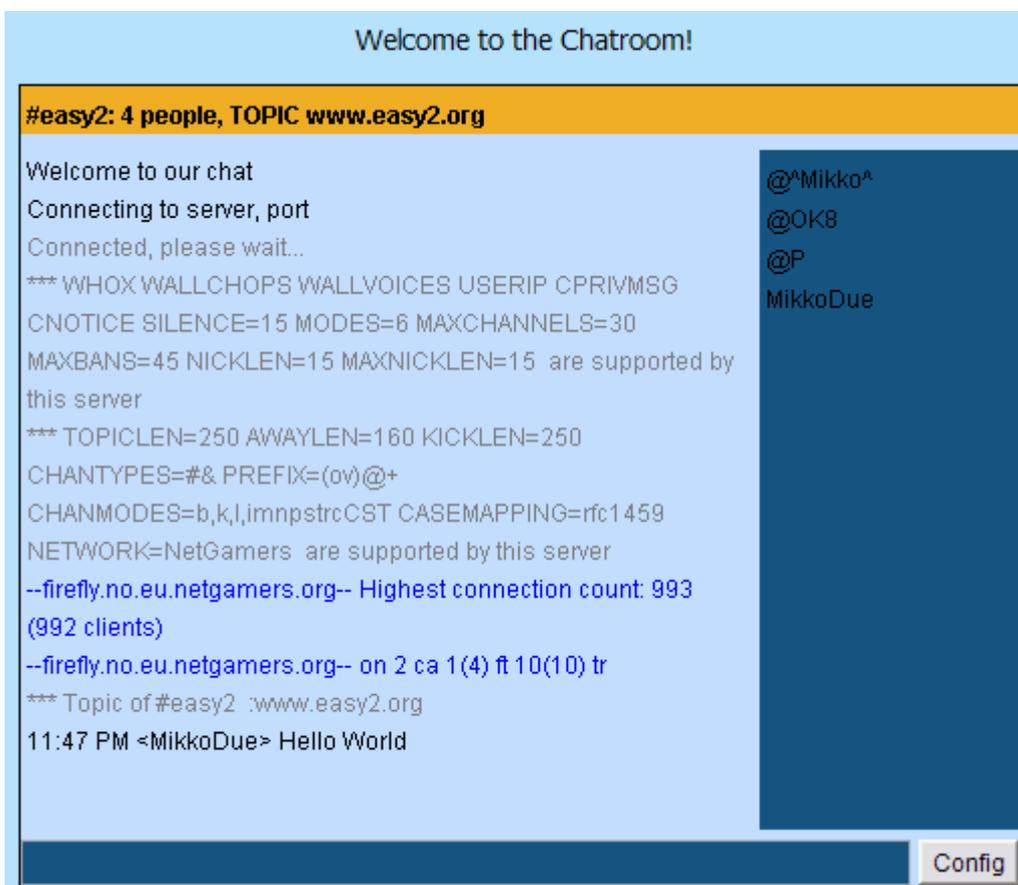


Your computer may ask you something like this:



If it does, click **Yes**.

When Chat starts, you will see a few messages, then this window:



You can write on the blue line at the bottom. To send your message, press the **Enter** key. On the right, you see the people who are online. Messages appear in the light blue area.

Be polite in the Chat. Don't **YELL** at people and don't write the same thing over and over again.

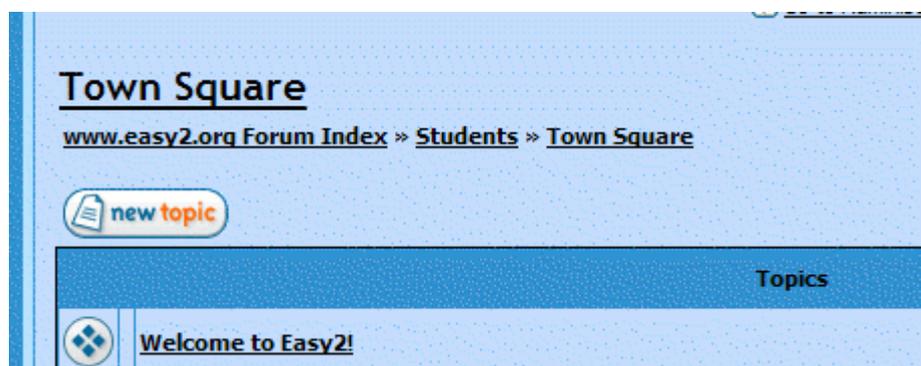
Click on **Forum** in the menu to access the Easy2 Forum.



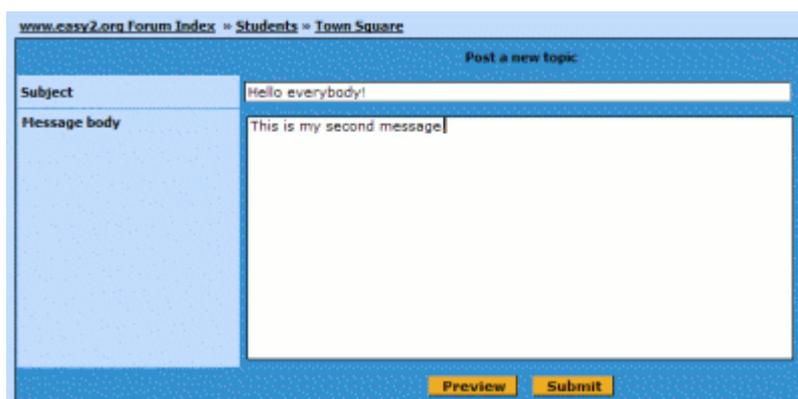
You will see the **discussion areas** on the next page.



Click on **Town Square**. You will see the discussions in that area.



To read messages, click on the title. You will see the contents of the message. If you want to write a new message, click on **New Topic**.



In **Subject**, write what your message is about. In **Message body**, write your message. Then click **Submit** to send.

If you read something someone else has written and want to reply to it, click on **Reply**. Writing a reply is like writing a new message.

6. Using the Search and Sitemap

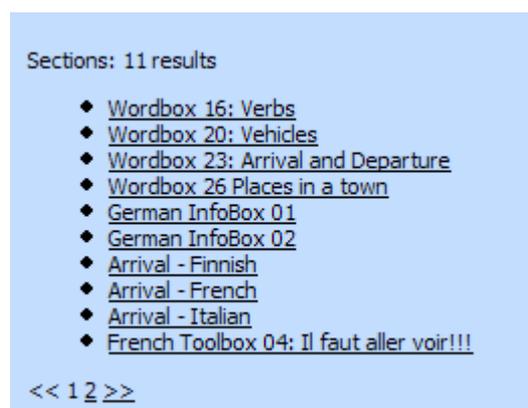
To find something on Easy2, you can use the **Search** page.



Searching is easy. Just write what you need to find in the white box and click **Search**.

A screenshot of a search interface. At the top, it says "Search For:" followed by a white input box and a "Search" button. Below this are four orange horizontal bars, each with a green checkmark icon on the left and text on the right: "Search Sections", "search DiaryBox", "Search Members", and "Search FAQs".

You will get results like this:

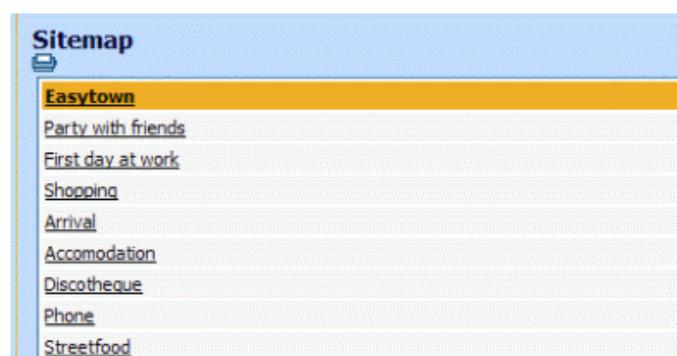


Just click on the name of the article to go there.

You can also use the **Sitemap** to find what you are looking for.



The sitemap lists all the important pages. Just click where you want to go.

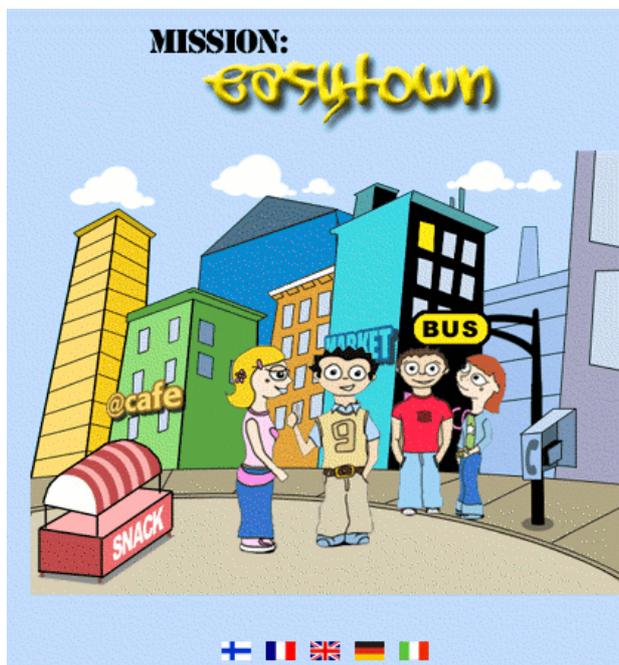


7. Mission: Easytown

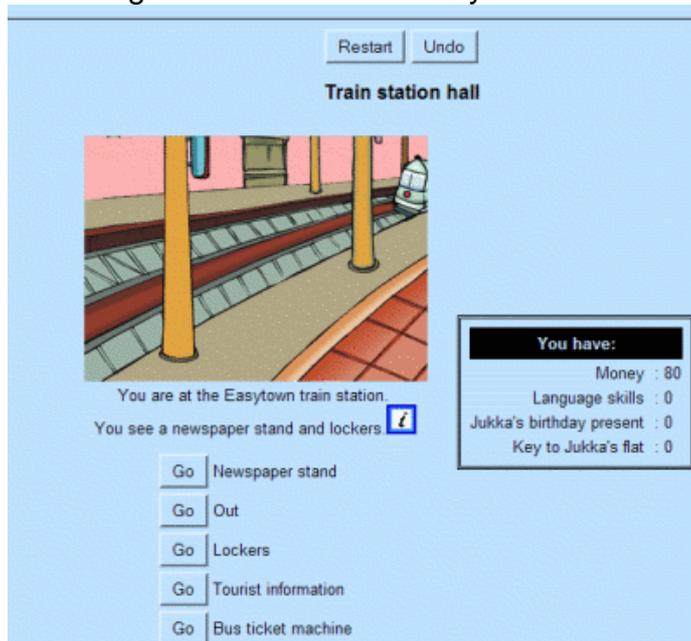
In **Mission: Easytown** you play a language learning game. Your task is to get to Jukka's birthday party. To enter you will need a present and some language points.



In the first screen, select the language you want to play in by clicking the **flags**. Don't play in your own language!



You play the game by **clicking on the correct button**. Read the text and choose the right answer. There are lots of things to do in Mission: Easytown!



IMPORTANT: DO NOT CLICK "BACK" ON YOUR WEB BROWSER WHILE PLAYING MISSION: EASYTOWN!

8. Leaving Easytown

When you are ready to leave Easytown, remember to click **Logout!** This way, nobody else will access your DiaryBox or messages by accident.



Thank you for reading this guide to Easytown! We hope you like it in our town of language learning.

The Easy2 team

EASY2 is a project of Lingua 2, an action in the Socrates framework. Socrates is a program of the European Commission, DG Education and training. With the support of Socrates, Leonardo and Youth Technical Assistance Office www.socleoyouth.be



Easy2 Pedagogical Manual

Version 1.0

January 27th, 2005

Author: Mikko Heinonen, mikko.heinonen@easy2.org

Contents

Introduction
Notes on site usage
Theoretical background
Pedagogical theory in on-line learning
Level of language
'Can do' statements
Types of activities
Teaching grammar in the Easy2 environment
Sample lessons based on the Easy2 environment

Appendix A: Addendum to Student's Manual

Introduction

The purpose of this pedagogical manual is to present the pedagogical framework of the Easy2 project, and the basis on which activities have been selected for use in the learning environment. Each of the exercise types is studied in terms of the theoretical basis and presented with view to the learning goals. The Common European Framework is used as the basis for the definition of the levels of language.

Notes on site usage

The usage of the learning environment is further specified in the student manual "**Welcome to Easytown**". Teachers are asked to familiarise themselves with the contents of this manual prior to site operation. There are a few teacher-specific features in the environment; these are discussed in Appendix A, Addendum to Student's Manual.

Theoretical background

The Easy2 project relies on three pedagogical principles: **Authenticity**, **Open Dialogue** and **Experiential Learning**. These concepts are discussed in more detail in the following:

Authenticity

Authenticity in the learning situation refers to the fact that the material and learning situations used aim at a level of language required for relevant communication. The essential aim of the project is to develop a tool enabling its users to communicate with each other, internationally. In other words, the project aims at strengthening the *intercultural communication competence of the end users and*

creating an intercultural learning environment.

Open Dialogue

Open dialogue is a term related to the nature of the learning situation. In an open dialogue, both the learner and the trainer are holistically involved in the learning process. Learners and trainers *co-author*, i.e. create together, in an environment that carries the notion of mutual trust. In an open dialogue, there are no prejudices or labels.

Experiential Learning

As the name implies, experiential learning carries the meaning of learning from experience. However, this is a much wider concept than one would initially think; experiential learning is a holistic method of learning that takes into account the learner and trainer as individuals. People are naturally interested in learning what they perceive as important; therefore, the aim is to reach the areas of interest of the target group, and create exercises and activities that naturally interest them. In experiential learning, the role of the trainer shifts from the traditional 'tutor' to co-explorer and facilitator of learning. The importance of appropriate feedback to a successful learning experience is also acknowledged.

It is these three principles that form the basis of the www.easy2.org learning environment. Below, we will go deeper into the realisation of these principles in an on-line learning tool.

Pedagogical theory in on-line learning

The essential goal of the project has been to apply these theoretical starting points into practice in an Internet learning website. The solution has been to choose texts and activities supporting these goals as far as possible. When compared to other learning materials, the Easy2 project has taken new and different approaches on a number of issues.

In the table below, you can see the main features of the material in terms of the pedagogical theory they are intended to support. Since there is intentional overlap in the definition of the terms, there is also overlap in the areas covered.

Goal supported	<i>Authenticity</i>	<i>Open Dialogue</i>	<i>Experiential learning</i>
On-line Material	* Story texts created by target group * Collaboration tools: Chat, ShoutBox, Forum	* Exercises of different levels, carefully considered feedback * Easy, well-planned user interface * Additional information to encourage curiosity	* Story texts deal with interests of target group and actual, real-life situations * Collaboration tools: Chat, ShoutBox, Forum

Table 1. Theoretical starting points for on-line learning.

Level of language

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is an internationally approved tool for measuring language competence. It divides language competence into a total of 6 levels:

A (Basic User): A1 Breakthrough Level, A2 Waystage Level

B (Independent User): B1 Threshold Level, B2 Vantage Level

C (Proficient User): C1 Effective Operational Proficiency Level, C2 Mastery Level

The Easy2 project focuses on the beginner level learners of its target languages. The goal is to allow for the users of the material to accumulate A1 level knowledge of the language studied. The description of a speaker of A1 level language in the Common European Framework is as follows:

Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.
(p. 24)

It has been shown that during the learning process, learners are able to take in and understand language of a level above their own current level, even if they can not produce it themselves. Some of the material, therefore, is of A2 level, which is described in terms of 'can do' statements by the Common European Framework as below:

Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
(p. 24)

'Can do' statements

When defining the level of language, the Common European Framework presents the learner with a checklist of things that he/she can do once acquiring a certain level of language. To facilitate this approach into language learning, the Easy2 project has prepared its own learner checklist for the learning material, divided into sections by the different stories in the web site. By using this list, it is possible for the learner to self-evaluate whether he/she has met the required goals for the story in question. They are also useful for the course trainer when preparing evaluation based on the material. These 'can do' statements are presented in Table 2 below.

Name of story	<i>Party with friends</i>	<i>Street Food</i>	<i>Discotheque</i>	<i>First day at work</i>
'Can do' statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can understand days of the week and times of day when somebody speaks slowly and carefully. - I can ask simple questions and reply to them with 'yes' or 'no'. - I can react correctly to somebody greeting me. - I can respond to an introduction of a person in a simple way. - I can say hello and good-bye. - I can understand information about people when they are introduced to me (friend, sister, age). - I can ask people questions about where they live, what they like. - I can write a note to somebody to tell where I am or where we are to meet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can understand words and phrases in signs. - I can order food and drink by using words and body language. - I can handle basic quantities (small, big, large, bottle). - I can comment on things in a simple way (good, great). - I can understand basic words to do with food. - I can ask to pay in a restaurant. - I can ask for and understand the cost of items. - I can ask someone to repeat what they said. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can understand the age limit and admission fee in a bar or club. - I can introduce people of my own age and reply to introductions. - I can tell people personal information about myself (age, address, telephone number). - I can suggest something to other people. - I can give others simple advice in doing something. - I can understand and use words to do with time (tomorrow, next week). - I can signal when I understand something, either with words or body language. - I can call for a waiter/waitress in a restaurant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can respond correctly when I am introduced to someone older than me. - I can give information about where I come from. - I can understand and use words to do with the time (7 o'clock, 10.35). - I can understand simple instructions about work. - I can ask simple questions about my tasks in a workplace. - I can understand simple directions (under, in front of). - I can express my like and dislike about something. - I can express what languages I can speak.
Name of story	<i>Shopping</i>	<i>Accommodation</i>	<i>On the phone</i>	<i>Arrival</i>
'Can do' statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can greet and reply to greetings from someone I have met before. - I can ask and reply questions about the well-being of others. - I can suggest things to people and reply to suggestions. - I can deal with money and prices. - I can understand and use basic words to do with clothing. - I can make simple purchases. - I can write a greeting card (a birthday card, Christmas card). - I can ask for attention (Excuse me). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can point out places in a town. - I can ask for simple directions and understand them. - I can ask for and reserve accommodation. - I can understand and fill in a simple registration form. - I can understand addresses and words to do with local transport. - I can use local transport. - I can react to small changes in the discussion (sorry, but...). - I can present identification or other documents when asked for them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can understand the most important messages in electronic equipment (phones, computers). - I can understand short, simple messages (SMS, email). - I can ask for and give out telephone numbers. - I can ask people to speak more slowly or louder. - I can ask people to do things. - I can describe where I am. - I can correctly begin and end a phone call. - I can indicate that I am following the conversation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can understand basic announcements. - I can understand simple descriptions of weather. - I can use a taxi. - I can welcome someone and reply to a welcome. - I can understand the locations in a home. - I can describe where I live. - I can buy a ticket for public transport. - I can write a simple description about myself.

Table 2. 'Can do' statements in the Easy2 learning material.

Types of activities

The Easy2 learning environment offers a number of activities for the learner. The following presents the learning goals supported by each type of activity.

Stories

Traditionally, reading passages have been the source of grammatically correct language and the introduction of new structures. While retaining this function to a great extent, the reading texts – Stories - in the Easy2 material primarily aim at the following functions:

- Present familiar experiences from the lives of the target group
- Offer the reader examples they can immediately use in the above situations
- Act as basis for vocabulary and structure expansion

WordBox

WordBoxes are the vocabulary tools in the Easy2 environment. They are constructed starting from the Story texts, but instead of only listing the translations for the words in the Stories, they are thematically arranged glossaries of words to do with the same theme.

The word lists are presented in all of the 5 languages of the project, and they are arranged alphabetically according to the English word. The aim is to present the user with the similarities and differences of the words in these languages, allowing them to see where the same word can be used in another language.

The WordBoxes are not intended to be used as material for word tests in class, but it is the teacher's decision whether or not all the vocabulary is deemed relevant enough for this purpose. Tests on particular themes of vocabulary would probably be preferable.

ToolBox

ToolBoxes present the user with the building blocks of the language, i.e. grammatical structures. They do not, however, utilise the standard grammatical vocabulary used in grammar books. This presents a new situation for the classroom context as well, see below for an in-depth explanation.

InfoBox

InfoBoxes are small bits of information presented on the topic of the Story. They can include cultural background information or language information.

ShoutBox, Forum and Chat

These tools form the user to user interaction part of the learning environment. The ShoutBox activities are simple and guided interaction exercises which present the user with simple communication tasks, such as saying "Hello" in another language. The ShoutBox is a real-time tool which allows other users to see what is being shouted and respond to it.

The Forum is a traditional user to user communication tool. In Easy2, however, it is also used to

expand on the topics discussed in the InfoBoxes and to carry out writing assignments.

The Chat is the most demanding and real-time tool for users to communicate. It requires a common language between users from different countries, and is the closest to "real" communication that can easily be achieved on-line.

DiaryBox

The DiaryBox is the user's personal area. It is used to store their diary entries, DiaryBox exercises and uploaded materials such as images. It can be made public or private at the user's request. In this respect, it comes very close to a learner portfolio.

A portfolio is a tool for learner self-assessment as well as evaluation. It is suited for any subject of study, and can be easily applied to language learning and teaching. The learner can follow their own progress by looking at the portfolio tasks and seeing how they have developed during the course of their studies. At the same time, the teacher can monitor their progress by looking at the tasks, or, more commonly, looking at tasks that the learner presents for evaluation from their own portfolio. This, in turn, forms the *sample portfolio* of the learner.

The MyBox activities aim at promoting the portfolio and stressing user input. The task of the teacher, when evaluating and commenting on the MyBox activities, is to encourage the user to write in their MyBox, regardless of the mistakes made initially.

Hot Potatoes exercises

The most common type of activity in the Easy2 environment is the Hot Potatoes exercise. Created using the Hot Potatoes toolkit, the exercises consist of the following types:

JMatch

This basic combination exercise requires the user, for example, to match pictures with images to remember vocabulary, or questions with answers to form dialogues.

JMix

These "jumbled sentence" exercises mainly teach word order and basic structures. The user is required to rearrange sentence elements that have been mixed up. The intention has been to arrange the elements so as to avoid ambiguity and to stress the same items as in the ToolBoxes.

JCloze

Cloze exercises measure the ability of the learner to produce words in the target language. The correct answers are presented to the user in the form of a list, and he/she is expected to reproduce them.

JBC

The multiple choice quiz is an easily approachable and effective way of testing basic knowledge of the understanding of words and expressions. In the Easy2 environment, multiple choice questions are randomly selected from a larger number of items. This means that the exercise is different each time

and does not become simple repetition.

All the Hot Potatoes activities aim at giving the user clear feedback as to whether they were correct or incorrect in their answers. Help functions are also available to give clues when required.

Hot Potatoes can be used in class as a form of individual work. The teacher can set a standard, e.g. 80%, of the score that needs to be achieved before moving on to the next exercise. This way, the learners can work at their own pace and find interesting activities that suit themselves. The activities are arranged into different levels of difficulty, rated by stars (1 star is easy, 2 stars medium, 3 difficult).

Teaching grammatical structures with Easy2

One of the most unorthodox methods used by the Easy2 learning environment is that grammatical terms, i.e. *verb*, *adjective*, *noun* are completely absent from the material. Instead, grammatical structures are presented in the form of *ToolBoxes*, which offer the user "language building blocks" which they can use to construct sentences. The focus is on understanding difference in structure vs. difference in meaning. Visual images are used to illustrate the meaning, and different examples are presented side by side to give the user a context in which he/she can better understand the structure in question and learn how to use it to produce new examples. Each ToolBox has a selection of supporting Hot Potatoes exercises.

When using the environment as a teaching tool, therefore, it is more effective to remain coherent with the approach adapted by the material. It is assumed that the primary target group is not as interested in grammar as in using the language, nor do the A1/A2 levels of language competence necessitate extensive grammatical expertise on the language studied. Therefore, teaching should concentrate on variation on the themes presented in the material, instead of attempting to explain the structures in a traditional fashion. The teacher is able to give more examples and elaborate further than the material if required, and this should be considered the primary asset in grammar teaching.

Sample lessons based on the Easy2 learning environment

In the following, we present a few examples of language lessons based on the Easy2 environment. The teacher is asked to familiarise themselves with site operation prior to the first lesson.

Lesson number 1: Introductory lesson

Duration: 40-45 minutes

Class procedure:

1. Have every student seated next to a computer workstation. It is highly preferred that they have one computer per student. Have them open the web browser and go to www.easy2.org. It will be helpful if you have this done before the start of the lesson, so you have Easy2 on every screen when the students arrive.
2. Explain the idea of the site to your students. It is important that they know what they are doing and why. Tell them they can meet with other young people and learn to exchange ideas with them on this site.
3. Instruct your students on the registration and login procedure. For clarity's sake, it will be good to have a coherent system of choosing usernames, for example:

*Pirkanmaan Taitokeskus = your school, class of 2005, student's name Pekka
becomes pirta05_pekka*

Preferably, create usernames for your students in advance. A good system will help you locate your student's DiaryBoxes and their posts on the Forum, as well as their Chat and ShoutBox messages. It is also more than likely that a popular first name is already taken as a username, which will create unnecessary confusion.

4. Have all your students go to one of the Stories, you can choose a suitable one beforehand. Show them how to listen to the texts, change pages and alter text language.
5. Have them look at the Activity Index. Ask them to take look at each of the Box and Activity types.
6. Experience from testing has shown that there is very little time for anything else during the introductory lesson. If you do have additional time, ask your students to write an entry in their DiaryBoxes to familiarise themselves with their system. This can be done in whichever language, however, the target language should be favoured. Ask them to mark their entries viewable to "Everyone" or "Teachers". You can later on log in and check what they have written.
7. At the end of the lesson, make sure everyone clicks **Logout** prior to leaving the site. This way, their information will not be accessible by others by accident.

Lesson number 2: "Standard" lesson

Duration: adjustable

Prerequisites:

Your students should now have login accounts and be acquainted with the basic operation of the site – if required, you can spend additional time on this at the beginning of the lesson. This lesson concentrates on the essential content of the environment.

Class procedure:

1. Have everyone log in to their accounts.
2. Direct your students to the Story you have chosen as the text of the day.
3. Have them read through and listen to the text at their own pace. Ask them to try and work out the meaning of the text on their own, then change language and verify. If you want to, you can conclude this phase by having students read the stories out loud in pairs, or by repeating the text after your example.
4. Take a look at the ToolBox(es) linked to the story in the Activity Index. Ask your students to produce more examples based on the pattern presented in the ToolBox. However, it is important that they are not asked to write down rules. The material is presented in such a way as to allow for them to deduce the necessary structures themselves.

NOTE: This sort of treatment of ToolBoxes should be limited to one or two ToolBoxes per session. In phase 7, the students are free to explore the environment, and they may look at other ToolBoxes if they so desire.

5. See which of the Hot Potatoes activities support the ToolBox. After reviewing the contents of the ToolBox, have your students start work with these Hot Potatoes.
6. The WordBoxes are intended for use as reference tools throughout the lesson. They are searchable with the site search function. If your students encounter a word they are not familiar with, tell them to write the word in the Search bar. This should return the WordBox they are looking for.
7. After the ToolBox activities are complete, give your students free choice over the rest of the material: WordBoxes and their activities, DiaryBoxes or ShoutBoxes. There will be variation in their rate of progress, so while some will complete most, if not all, of the activities, some will have problems completing those of the first story part. This is a major upside of the material such as it is presented: no-one needs to feel left behind.
8. At the end of the session, make sure everyone clicks **Logout**.

Lesson number 3: Initial communicative lesson

Duration: 25-30 minutes

Prerequisites:

The Easy2 learning environment is a powerful communicative tool. The different capabilities can be used for communication between students from different countries. However, it is necessary for the users to be able to utilise the functions amongst themselves before any larger communication is attempted. This lesson takes place in a single classroom and it "simulates" communication within the group.

Class procedure:

1. Have everyone log in. Explain that all communication within the site must take place in the target language for the duration of the lesson, and everyone is expected to take part.

2. Go to the Chat function. Wait for it to start. Answer "Yes" to authentication questions.

Note: Depending on the configuration of your school's network, the Chat function may not work as desired. In that case, you can use the ShoutBox for similar, albeit more limited functionality.

3. Once in the Chat, have a round of introductions. Ask everyone to tell their real name in the target language. This way, also the students can see who is who in the Chat.

4. Choose a topic for discussion in the Chat. Good ideas for the first time would be poll-type questions that can be answered with Yes or No. Be sure to emphasize the following:

- No SHOUTING (with capital letters) in the Chat
- Everyone waits for their turn to answer, no "flooding" (typing the same thing over and over)
- Target language only

5. When you feel that you have the hang of the Chat, let the discussion flow for a few moments. Then explain you are going to take a look at the Forum now.

6. Go to the Forum and start a topic with a question. Ask for everyone to come and answer it. Tell them where it is located. You can easily monitor when replies arrive by clicking "Reload"/"Refresh" on your browser every few minutes.

7. For the rest of the lesson, give your students free choice over the tools of communication. It is not dangerous if they slip into their native language for a while, since the emphasis is as much on learning the tools as on learning the language. Just make sure all communication occurs through the above means.

Lesson number 4: Intercultural communicative lesson

Duration: 45-60 minutes

Prerequisites:

The Easy2 environment is used by language learners and teachers from all over Europe. It is possible for you to establish contact with other teachers and groups through the Teacher Forum. This lesson necessitates that you have:

- Found another group with the same target language, or the same native language as your target language
- Agreed on a time for both of your groups to be online at the same time.

Class procedure:

1. Prepare a task for your students during the previous lesson. Tell them they are about to meet people from another country, and have them write a set of questions to ask them during the next lesson. Before the beginning of the lesson, check that everyone has written these questions. Otherwise students who are unprepared may disturb the work of others.
2. Join the Chat, or the Forum if you are unable to use the Chat, at the same time in both locations. Prior to commencing the actual discussion, agree on who asks the questions and who answers (if you are using the Forum, you can do this in the ShoutBox). Preferably, you can do this assignment both ways, so both groups can do similar tasks and both ask and answer questions.
3. Have your students make notes during the discussion. After the Chat, have them write the answers to the questions in the DiaryBox. Afterwards, you can check their assignments by logging in.
4. Again, at the end of the lesson, make sure everyone logs out!

APPENDIX A: Addendum to Student's Manual

Teacher-only functions

The Easy2 environment has functions which are designed for teachers. The main features are:

- Read access to DiaryBox entries marked "Teachers only"
- Access to private "Teacher Forum" for discussion with other teachers

Teacher permissions are not granted automatically. They need to be requested from the Easy2 administration. The procedure is as follows:

1. Register a username at www.easy2.org
2. Send email to admin@easy2.org stating your username, full name, address and telephone number (for verification purposes), as well as the school you work for.
3. You will be notified by email when your account has been upgraded to a teacher account.