THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF WORDS: A COMPUTER-BASED LEARNING EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT. *This article reports on an action research project that took place as part of two regular and compulsory courses in the 3rd year of English Studies at Alcalá University, developed in the Blackboard learning system, that is, a computer-mediated format. The steps of the project were the following: Firstly, the integration of computerized tools in the curriculum of the two university subjects. Secondly, the implementation of this learning experience was based on a corpus of selected texts which were annotated to help and guide students in their work* (the World of Texts); *and a database used by students to deal with lexical analysis and to record their findings and their knowledge about lexical items from the texts compiled* (the Web of Words). *By integrating ICT in the teaching process, we expected to foster students' autonomy and motivation as well as to improve their lexical and semantic competence. The research results suggest that, in the first place, the computer-mediated format increased students' motivation and encouraged autonomy in the learning process; in addition, it contributed to a better understanding of both subjects.*

KEY WORDS. *English language, Lexicology and Semantics, blended learning, tutorials, computer-based learning, autonomous learning.*

RESUMEN. *Este artículo da cuenta de una investigación que tuvo lugar como parte de dos asignaturas obligatorias del tercer curso de Estudios Ingleses en la Universidad de Alcalá y que se desarrolló en el sistema de aprendizaje Blackboard; es decir, un formato de aprendizaje a través del ordenador. Los pasos que se siguieron para el proyecto fueron los siguientes: En primer lugar, la integración de las herramientas informáticas en el currículo de dos asignaturas universitarias. A continuación, la implementación de esta experiencia de aprendizaje se basó en un corpus de textos que se compiló y anotó para ayudar y guiar al alumnado en su trabajo. El corpus se llamó* the World of Texts; *una base de datos que los estudiantes usaron para el análisis y almacenamiento de los hallazgos y los conocimientos sobre las unidades léxicas extraídas de los textos seleccionados. Dicha base se denominó* the Web of Words. *Mediante la integración de las tec-*

nologías de la información y la comunicación en el proceso de enseñanza, se esperaba promover la autonomía y la motivación del alumnado, así como mejorar su competencia léxico-semántica. Los resultados de la investigación sugieren que, primeramente, el formato de aprendizaje por ordenador aumentó la motivación y promovió la autonomía de los estudiantes en el proceso de aprendizaje. Adicionalmente, también contribuyó a la mejora en el entendimiento de ambas asignaturas.

PALABRAS CLAVE. *Lengua inglesa, lexicología y semántica, aprendizaje híbrido, tutorías, aprendizaje por ordenador, aprendizaje autónomo.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Information and Communication Technologies (henceforth ICT) have a number of widely recognized advantages that are very useful for the teaching methodology brought about by the new concept of learner-centred education demanded by the European Space of Higher Education. Although researchers on CALL generally acknowledge the possibilities of the Web for language learning, the integration in the curriculum is arduous. Nevertheless, we agree with Pennock-Speck (2009: 183) who pointed out that "if our university and state universities in general are to remain at the forefront in teaching and research in the future, we have to make sure that we implement ICT as effectively as possible in the new degree".

The experience reported here took place at Alcalá University with undergraduate students analysing the effect of using a virtual platform in a blended course, that is, in combination with face-to-face classes. Students were in their third year of English Studies enrolled in one of the two or both compulsory courses: *English Lexicology and Semantics* and *History of the English Language*. The length of the project extended roughly for a year and a half (February 2009 to June 2010), taking into account preparation time and implementation with students.

In previous academic years, it had been observed that the motivation in students decreased as the academic year was passing by, affecting their academic results in a negative way. The project was developed within the Action Research Project framework (henceforth, ARP). Action research is defined by Mills (2003: 4) as a systematic inquiry to gather information with the aim of gaining insight. By developing reflective practice and implementing positive changes the student's outcomes would improve. Thus, our initial hypothesis was that the introduction of ICT in the subjects would help to increase undergraduates' motivation, promote autonomous learning and would improve their performance.

This ARP was inspired on a previous experience that took place at Vrije Universitiet Amsterdam. They developed a database, *Lexvaardig*[1], with the aim of enlarging students' lexical competence in several languages. As one of the members of the Amsterdam team, Prof. Lachlan Mackenzie, was on a research visit at Alcalá University, and being aware of his previous teaching experience and research on English Lexicology and Semantics, we thought of implementing a similar project to the one that was carried out at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Finally, we agreed to replicate a similar

experience at Alcalá University, and he and his team were extremely generous and provided us with publications on the topic, the texts they have been dealing with to be handed out to students and the original database. Besides, he advised us about the previous work and helped with part of the adaptation.

The final objective of the project was to foster students' autonomy and increase students' motivation in both subjects, as well as to improve their lexical and semantic competence from a synchronic and diachronic perspective, using computerized tools in an online environment (Blackboard learning system). In order to achieve these objectives the task was designed to be assessed for two different compulsory subjects: *Lexicology and Semantics of the English Language* and *History of the English Language*. We did so because, as Huertas and Aguado (2003: 50) claim, when Spanish students are tested on motivation, getting a pass in exams is the option that ranks higher among them. Having this in mind, the teachers thought that an activity that could be graded in two different subjects could be attractive baits for undergraduates.

This project helps to stimulate original approaches and to introduce online environments as a learning object over the traditional system in two university courses. As Hanewald (2009: 117) points out "the gap in the literature and subsequently in current research on case studies, practical applications, assessments, and learning outcomes strongly suggests future research by language educators and practitioners for illumination and possible resolution". And our project tries to partly bridge the gap. Nevertheless, we need to clarify that our experiment does not completely eliminate traditional face-to-face course sessions. It does not constitute a pure distance teaching environment, as we believe that the overall teaching in a research university should be based on some sessions in lecture halls or seminar rooms. Like in the case of Pérez-Cañado (2010), this is an instance of blended learning or what Vaughan calls hybrid model (2007: 82).

2. THE STUDY

2.1. *Participants*

The total number of participants involved in the project was 54 students in their third year of English Studies, divided in two groups: 45 students were enrolled in the subject *History of the English Language*, and 54 in the subject *English Lexicology and Semantics*. As both courses were compulsory, the core group is common to both subjects, but 9 students enrolled in *English Lexicology and Semantics*, but did not in *History of the English Language*. Their participation in the project was voluntary, as they could opt to sit exams to pass both subjects.

2.2. *Planning and Material Preparation*

Pérez-Basanta (2004: 28) claims that "materials should be designed to meet students' needs, interests, experiences, and expectations". It follows from here that the replication of the experience had to be worked on from different perspectives on our part:

1) Adaptation of the database, which would be named *Wonderful World of Words*. All the components of the database will be explained in section 2.2.1.

2) Compilation of a corpus of annotated texts, which is referred to as the *World of Texts* in the project (section 2.2.2.), made up of a selection of different text types in which a number of lexical items have explanations in order to help students pay attention to the characteristics of English words or expressions.

3) Drafting of a manual on Lexicology and Semantics that our students could consult (hereafter *Lexical Learning*). This manual contains a guideline of word-formation processes in English, a summary of basic lexicological and semantic concepts, and description and illustration of lexical and semantic historical processes.

4) Uploading the materials, links to lexicographic works, the database and the manual onto the Virtual Learning Environment of the University of Alcalá, Blackboard. We decided that the computer-mediated format, Blackboard learning system, would be the most suitable method as it integrates all the functionalities into one single space where you can communicate with students via email, announcements, chats or discussion groups and store all the information that is needed and is "also designed to give learners individual control over the pace of learning" (Benson 2001: 137). We pondered on other options like blogs or wikis, but this one seemed to be the best way of updating contents. Just the students and the teachers were granted access to the whole system containing documents, links, the data base and all the other usual utilities included in Virtual Learning Environments.

2.2.1. The Database

The database *The Wonderful World of Words* allowed students to compile their own personalized file, which could be enlarged and recorded for future reference. The original database was designed at Amsterdam University, though it was modified to conform to our teaching needs. Being an Access file let us modify, first of all, the language. Originally the database was in Dutch, which made it invalid for our students. We translated the labels selected from the original one into English. Some fields were deleted and others included or expanded to adapt it to the contents taught in the two subjects the database was dealing with. The information provided when clicking on the *Info* button was also modified and written in English to adapt it to the new situation. The assistance of a technician was extremely helpful when adapting the original database to our students' needs.

As can be seen below, the entry screen consists of two parts: the upper part contains the essential data of the lexical unit and the lower part contains data that are displayed if you click the appropriate button; its role is the completion. By clicking on the button again, you cause the field to disappear again, but only if no data have been entered. When consulting records that have been completed earlier, only those fields which were completed then are shown.

Figure 1. Entry screen from the *Wonderful World of Words*

The information to be entered was described in detail in the document entitled *Lexical Learning*[2]. Although some of the fields are self-explanatory, here is an explanation of the information to be completed in the entry screen. Some of the fields are compulsory. Other labels will be displayed depending on the chosen option.

Lexical unit: This field could not be left empty and could also not be filled in twice with the same entry. If a lexical unit was to be entered more than once, a number had to be added between brackets. If for example the lexical unit "house" was entered twice (both as a noun and as a verb), this should appear as "house (1)" and "house (2)".

Example: The exact example from students' text was to be placed, although they could also add other examples.

Text: Students were asked to identify their text with the title, as given in the original document.

Word formation: The learner is supposed to name the process that has taken place (derivation, clipping, blending, etc.).

Grammatical information: First there was a selection on Type: "standard" or "fixed expression". The entry of data concerning complementation, selection restrictions, classification, function, etc. is dependent upon the type of word class chosen.

Translation: Students were required to provide the word or expression in Spanish that is appropriate in this context.

Meaning definition: A definition of the lexical unit as used in the context had to be given.

Lexicographic sources: Students were provided with a list of references, although they could use others stating the one(s) that had been consulted for filling in the fields.

In the second part of the screen the data were just activated when clicking on the appropriate button as can be seen in Figure 2:

Figure 2. Display of all fields

Connotation: A classification could be found in the *Lexical Learning* document, specifying whether the connotation was due to stylistic, expressive or other reasons.

Meaning relation(s): Students were asked to complete as many of these fields as possible trying to identify the relationships established between words always according to the meaning in their text.

Historical information: This section was specially designed to work on the *History of the English Language* subject. Although other fields, such as meaning relations and connotations were just seen through time, here students were required to provide the etymology of the word first, and then, if applicable, to identify the historical process that the unit has undergone and justify their decision.

Words in use: These fields were to be completed only if relevant for the lexical unit. If you leave the field empty, that will be equivalent to "not applicable".

Spelling and Pronunciation: Here any feature that is interesting for students' learning of the language in terms of spelling and pronunciation should be mentioned. Students were warned about the fact that the system would not allow the introduction of the International Phonetic Alphabet notation directly, but one can make comments on the unit by comparing it with some other word; e.g. "rough" rhymes with "tough". Likewise, if copied from another source like an online dictionary or a word file it could preserve the original characters.

Remarks: This field is used to add remarks about lexical features (or other matters) for which there is no other suitable field or explanations that students considered important in order to explain any of the information provided.

2.2.2. Corpus of annotated texts

Although Professor Mackenzie provided us with part of the texts used at Amsterdam University, there was a detailed process of selection as the implementation of our project was based on different criteria. That is the reason why other documents were included to suit our needs at the time and in order to enlarge the corpus. The text types covered different topics and the main sources ranged from mass media (both printed or online magazines and periodicals) to manuals and books in general. Regarding the texts types, there were general articles, but also extracts from scientific and scholarly texts. Some texts from the previous experience were rejected because the topic was obsolete, usually linked to an event like the death of a celebrity or the success of a musical band. On some other occasions, the topic seemed to be too local describing the opening of a new department store, mall or similar place in the Netherlands and, most of the times, the texts were discarded if they were either too long or too short. Besides, some of the annotations in the texts selected from the previous corpus were modified or changed completely and, in all cases, some comments about historical processes were incorporated. Table 1 illustrates the topics chosen:

ANNOTATED TEXTS

- American English-only politics
- Guy Fawkes
- Michael Jackson Memorial
- Origins of fruit flies
- Avoiding Pollution
- UK rejection of capital punishment
- Veggies who eat meat
- Was there a real Jane Eyre
- Skateboarding girls
- Cluttering the countryside
- Gesture language of deaf
- Mourning a drugs victim
- Trudgill on standard and non-standard English
- Byatt on Europe and Britain novels
- Asteroid threat
- Carbon monoxide and safety
- Anorexia is not just refusing to eat
- Effects of drinking
- Supermarket trolleys
- Stereotyping Irish on TV

Table 1. A sample of the topics of the annotated texts.

We agreed on handing out one or two texts, depending on the length, to be worked on to each student. We tried the text, or both texts, to be around 1,000 words in total.

Each text (or pair of texts) was annotated with ten annotations on grammatical, semantic, cultural, historical or socio-pragmatic issues that could guide the undergraduates on the kind of information they had to pay attention to when learning vocabulary and to help them about the information they were asked to include. One example that can illustrate the corpus of annotated texts is shown in Figure 3:

Figure 3. An example of an annotated text.

3. IMPLEMENTING THE PROJECT

As mentioned before, apart from the database and the corpus of texts, students were also provided with a manual on Lexicology and Semantics as well as links to various lexicographic and reference works[3]. Everything was uploaded onto the Virtual Learning Environment, which includes the usual communication tools: email, forums and chat. The use of the platform contributes to the course adaptation and helps a more favourable context for language learning (Yip 2004). In fact, the project was developed in a blended environment as we considered it would stimulate students' participation and motivation (Motteram 2006). Furthermore, some of the communication tools, like the

forums which were originally designed to communicate with the teachers, were freely used by students not only for this purpose, but also as a channel to share their thoughts, ideas and to try to solve the problems they encountered when working on their lexical competence in collaboration with their classmates.

Once the material was ready, we set off the project as part of the group tutorials required by the Bologna Process. By adapting to the convergence with all the other European Union Universities involved in this process, in Spain we now have fewer face-to-face sessions and meet students in small groups instead, in order to guide them on how to carry out different projects, write essays and similar tasks. This project was designed to be followed by those students who wanted to be evaluated according to the continuous assessment system and, therefore, were compelled to attend those group tutorials. On the contrary, until the University regulations were amended, many Spanish Universities used to consider attendance to classes or seminars a right instead of a duty for students. Those students who did not come regularly to lessons were entitled to be assessed by other more traditional methods like exams to be fixed by the academic authorities twice during the academic year. Thus, our students were volunteers or rather they had the option of choosing between getting involved in the *Wonderful World of Words* project, a computer-mediated learning environment, or, on the contrary, take a final exam at the end of the semester, that is, the conventional learning assessment. The advantage for those following the continuous assessment system is that, if the activities were done properly, students did not have to take the final practical exam of the above mentioned subjects as they worked regularly throughout the semester.

Students attended a first group tutorial where the task was explained. Each of them was assigned the text(s) depending on their length and was asked to complete the lexical records, following the model provided in their texts. Students' motivation was boosted by the fact that they could freely choose the lexical items from the assigned texts, therefore they worked with the lexical items that were of any interest for them and provided the corresponding information in the lexical records. Besides, our intention was to promote learners autonomy in the vocabulary learning process, as the process of completing the lexical records implies the use of several resources, for example dictionaries, the best tool for lifelong learning.

Students had access to Blackboard, which involves all the tools and material (the texts, the Lexical Learning manual, the database and the links to the selected lexicographic and reference works) were available to them**.** Students had the option of completing the part corresponding to just one subject or to both, although there was a common section compulsory in both courses.

Here are some examples of lexical records submitted by our students. The first one corresponds to the word *clamor*. Although it can be a noun or a verb, here it has been completed in its verb function, because it is the way in which it appears in the text. Subsequently, the translation is done by means of a verb in Spanish and the collocations are those that are to be found with such a word category. As a curiosity, in the "Spelling

and Pronunciation" section it has been mentioned the fact that the spelling is different in Standard British English and American English.

Figure 4. Student's lexical record: *clamor.*

In Figure 5, again, all the required fields were completed.

Figure 5. Student's lexical record: *war.*

In the previous examples, just those fields that do not apply are not selected. However in the example in Figure 6, we can have a look at a lexical unit that was chosen for its historical value. Thus, the label "Historical Information" has been activated. The process has been identified as narrowing and the explanation of such a phenomenon appears in the box named "Explanation".

Figure 6. Student's lexical record with Historical Information.

The examples shown in Figures 4, 5 and 6 correspond to individual pieces of work, which were submitted by our students after reading the text, choosing a list of lexical items and recording the information regarding lexicological, semantic and historical characteristics, using different sources and putting into practice their theoretical knowledge about both subjects. Since the database is implemented in an Access file, the students had the option of continuing working on their own. The database can be enlarged by completing so many records as students wish. In this way, the teachers provided them with a tool for lifelearning, as it is a useful way of storing information about the English vocabulary they learn in a computer-readable format.

4. GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF THE PROJECT

If we assess the overall interest and performance, a word of praise must be said for the group tutorial system. It has traditionally been assumed that tutorials in small groups are a good way of promoting communication between teachers and students, as the latter feel uninhibited, and also encourage communication among students. Tutorials also foster individual autonomy and facilitate the learning process, as students have all the

available materials at hand and are not pressed by the time imposed when taking an exam. Likewise, tutorials make students able to find and select strategies that could solve the problems they encounter. The final aim is for students to transfer the given strategies not only to their future career but also to their personal life. Pérez-Boullosa (2006: 136) shares this latter idea claiming that the objective of the tutorials is to stimulate the development of key competences for their professional life. Some of these competences are: work planning, team work, problem solving and communication. Teachers are nowadays responsible not only for transmitting knowledge, but for favouring the integral development of students, their capabilities, abilities, potentials and value systems.

The face-to-face tutorials are positive for students, but they also welcome the benefits of electronic communication. As other scholars have shown (Pérez-Lorido and Pérez-Lorido 2008), undergraduates are more prone to participating via email or in a virtual community than while attending the lesson. Likewise, they find it more convenient to have access to the tools at their own pace and leisure than attending traditional office tutorials with their teachers. Besides, computer-mediated communication promotes collaborative learning, as they share the final task, the problems encountered in the process will be sometimes similar, and the whole group can participate in finding common solutions. The internal communication among students in the Blackboard system, asking questions, sharing problems and solutions, was essential for their motivation when dealing with the work in both subjects.

Evidence of the success of the participation in the tutorials can be seen in the Table 2:

	History of the English Language			Lexicology and Semantics of the English Language		
	Number of enrolled students	Number of students in group tutorials	Number of students completing the process	Number of enrolled students	Number of students in group tutorials	Number of students completing the process
Year 2007/08	49	31	20	66	35	25
Year 2008/09	59	31	17	65	40	29
Year 2009/10	66	45	35	70	54	42

Table 2. Evolution of students' participation in group tutorials in both subjects.

The data from the table are worth commenting on. Although the assessment varied from the academic year 2011/12, at the time the research was carried out students could join the continuous assessment system or assessment via group tutorial at the beginning of the term and drop out whenever they wanted, as they could always take the final exam. The continuous assessment system was really an extra chance of passing the subject without taking any risks at all. That is why the initial participation of undergraduates is high, but the dropping out of the system is equally high. Many students feel overwhelmed with the tasks and essays required in each subject or do not find the

time and the motivation to continue with the tutorial system and decide not to attend lessons and tutorials and revise for the final exam instead. However, in the academic year when *Wonderful World of Words* was implemented, the students dropping out rate was not as significant as in the previous years. This is particularly true in the case of *Lexicology and Semantics* and not so obvious for the *History of the English Language* course. The number of students who completed the tutorial system in relation with enrolled students increases considerably the course in which a computer-mediated format is used, if we compare with previous academic courses, as Graph 1 reflects:
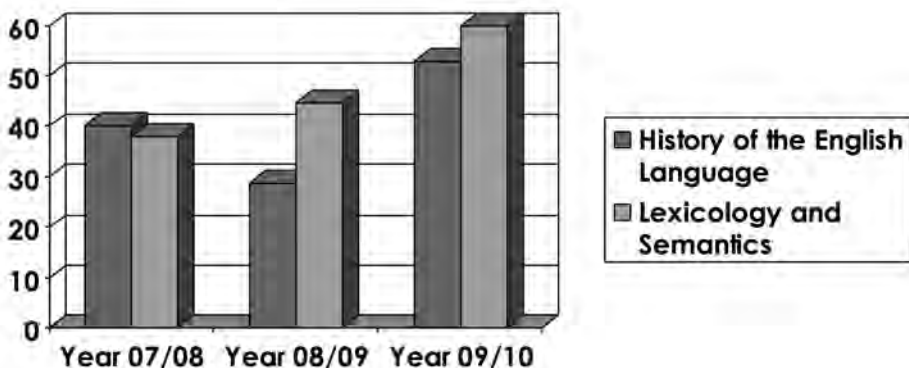
Graph 1. Number of students enrolled and completing the tutorial for each subject.

The participation in the group tutorial was a success, as the final marks were also higher than in previous years. Another interesting finding was the students' use of some of tools available in Blackboard. For instance, the forums were freely used by them to share problems and find solutions, which enhanced communication among the members of the group.

Finally, the technical service at University of Alcalá administered an anonymous survey among students enrolled in these courses to see to what extent they were satisfied with the use and the possibilities offered by the Virtual Learning Environment for this specific project. The questionnaire was fulfilled by 46 students out of the 54 undergraduates that were engaged in the project. This figure does not refer to the total amount of students enrolled in the courses, but only to the ones that voluntarily decided to take part in the project. There were 20 questions, some of which were included for statistical reasons and had to do with the students' background, such as whether they were combining their degree with some kind of part-time job or the place from which they used to access the Blackboard system. Others were directly related to the service provided by the technical staff at University. Among the latter, students were asked whether they had problems with their passwords and user names and whether the assistance from technicians was useful and as quick as they expected.

Nonetheless, the most enlightening information for our research is the one that had to do with the contents of the project, *Wonderful World of Words*. Part of this information was contained in the items, but there was also an open section to comment on the most positive aspects and the ones that should be improved. All the items had to be assessed from 1 to 5 points, with 5 being the maximum. Among the items were the following:

Q1. Information provided by the teachers on how to carry out the project.
Q2. Clarity and suitability of the objectives.
Q3. Structure and layout of the materials.
Q4. Sequencing and timing of the tasks.
Q5. The number of activities (forums, assignments…)
Q6. The contribution of the activities to students' learning.
Q7. The degree to which the activities fostered collaborative learning among classmates.

The average for the different items is presented in Graph 2.
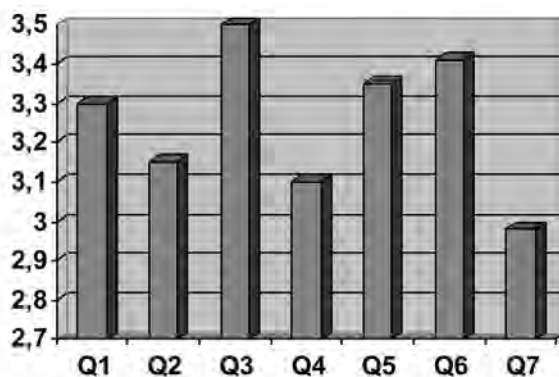
Graph 2. Students' survey on the project.

As can be seen in Graph 2, almost all the items related to the course got more than 3 points. The only item that was below this rank was the one about the promotion of collaborative learning. In fact, the assignments were designed to be worked on individually. Although, they made use of the forums to try to solve their doubts, whey would have appreciated an activity that requires pair or group collaboration.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Even if we agree with Huertas and Aguado (2003: 50) on the idea that passing their exams is the option that ranks higher among Spanish students, when being tested on

motivation, that could be taken as the trigger to decide to get engaged in the project. It is true that students could see the opportunity to *kill two birds with one stone*, given that taking part in the project would give them part of their mark for two different subjects. This fact made them optimise their effort, as they could concentrate on just one task with a twofold purpose, that is, passing two compulsory subjects. The idea was attractive and that could be the booster for their initial participation.

It is probably true that the intrinsic motivation, that is, the one that exists within the individual, correlates with the student's performance. In fact, Pérez (2006: 71) determined that there is a direct correspondence between intrinsic motivation (represented in the categories of interest in, satisfaction at and self-regulation of the learning process) and achievement. Even if this type of motivation originates from within the individual, the stimulus that generates intrinsic motivation is curiosity, pleasure and interest in learning. This motivation can be raised with the kind of tasks learners are presented with. In this sense, our project has demonstrated to have increased the students' motivation by rewarding them with a double mark with only an extra effort and with the satisfaction at having improved their lexical and semantic competence from a synchronic and diachronic perspective.

It is also clear that the *Wonderful World of Words* fits into the philosophy of autonomous learning, as it enhances the finding of information on particular units. Motteram (1997: 17) states that:

> There has always been a perceived relationship between educational technology and learner autonomy. This is taking educational technology in its broadest sense and taking learner autonomy as the superordinate term. This has become increasingly true for computers and self-access.

Though both teachers played a major role in offering support, guidance, and feedback at critical moments in the process either during face-to-face sessions or online, this action research project is a learner-centred approach because learners are engaged in active exploration, problem-solving and responsibility. Giving students freedom to immerse themselves in the project actively can lead to motivated and independent learners.

Likewise, as Michavila (2009: 14) claims "language teaching is particularly prone to methodological renewal and to the transition from passive learning to active education". We consider that the experience explained here integrate ICT as a means to innovation and renewal in different ways: The Virtual Learning Environments allowed students to make use of the communication facilities like email, discussion groups and chats to share ideas and thoughts with the other classmates and the teachers. The use of the corpus of texts and the database made them familiar with tools that are not often used by linguistic undergraduates, as this kind of research tools are often aimed at postgraduate students, we considered that this fact increased students' motivation. Besides, the option of access to a range of resources (mainly lexicographical works) fostered students' autonomy in the learning process. In summary, the blended system allowed them to make the most of the face-to-face sessions, but also of the virtual contact, as final marks and attitude reflected.

In addition, the students got really involved in the topic and their success rate was much higher than in previous years, when the project reported here had not been implemented yet. They evaluated the activity positively and their motivation also increased, as was reflected in the final questionnaire. In fact, students claimed to have become more aware of the lexical and semantic description of lexical units, both from a synchronic and a diachronic perspective. Besides, they also claimed to have developed skills in acquiring linguistic and cultural information about the English lexicon.

From the teachers' perspective, on the one hand, it was stimulating in the sense that students responded with a high participation and performance. On the other hand, the whole planning, preparation and implementation of the project were really time-consuming. Especially difficult tasks were finding the right texts and annotating them, as well as correcting all the information provided by students. The positive aspect is the fact that most of the work is already done and most of it can be reused. There is not much of a solution for correction, as it requires the individual marking and correcting of each student's piece of work. A possible way of lightening the burden of so much correction would be to establish a system of peer-assessment. This could be implemented in the future, though its efficiency should be checked.

All in all, we as teachers value the experience that provided students with a package consisting of a body of annotated texts, an introductory manual to Lexicology and Semantics and a personal database. They increased their knowledge and awareness on the complexity of the English lexical system and worked on their own autonomy as learners. Furthermore, we ourselves also felt involved in the process of learning how to integrate computer-mediated teaching in our courses design. Besides, we consider that the use of learning platforms in traditional courses contributes to lifelong learning by developing autonomy in language learning. Therefore, there is a need for an increasing use of these platforms at our universities if lifelong autonomous learning is to become a reality in European countries.

NOTES

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1. For further information on *Lexvaardig*, see Hannay, Vliegen and Greidanus (2005).

2. Sources used in the preparation of the document include Campbell (1998), Harley (2006), Jackson and Amvela (2000), Lipka (2002), Löbner (2002), Murrary (1996), Sihler (2000) and Singleton (2000).

3. Some of the recommended lexicographic works were*: Cambridge Dictionary*, *Longman Dictionary*, *Online Etymology Dictionary* and *Oxford English Dictionary*.

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