

# Reports on Past SIG Events

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## Using Word for language practice and PowerPoint for language analysis

Report on a workshop by [Clive Newton](#), University of Liverpool, entitled *Using Word for language practice and PowerPoint for language analysis* at the "Teacher Training for Information Technology (TT for IT)" joint IATEFL Computer & Teacher Trainers and Educators SIGs with Bell Teacher Training conference hosted at Bell Saffron Walden, UK, on 16-18 November 2001

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### Introduction

Clive Newton, now at the University of Liverpool, led a very interesting session on the use of modern word processors (such as Microsoft Word) and presentation software (such as Microsoft PowerPoint) in second language teaching and teacher training.

Clive showed how Word — or other suitable word processor — could be used to generate 1) language analysis activities, 2) text editing activities, and 3) collaborative writing activities. He also demonstrated the graphic advantages of PowerPoint — or other suitable presentation software — in highlighting salient language-related points during feedback sessions.

The session was organised as a series of hands-on practical tasks, with principles and rationales being brought out and discussed along the way. Clive used a series of pages in a single word processing document to move the participants on from one stage of the lesson to the next. One could easily see how such a document could be used as a sort of 'course-book-of-the-day'.

The techniques Clive presented were useful for both teacher trainers and classroom teachers, and to emphasise this, he included some "looping" of content (a la Tessa Woodward's (1991) Loop Input method). Sometimes we operated as teacher trainers, at other times as teacher trainees, and at still other

times as language learners.



## Tasks and techniques

1. We worked in pairs, using drag-and-drop techniques to re-assemble a jumbled text, and using text-colouring techniques to categorise words in a text by linguistic function. These techniques are highly generalisable, accommodating a wide range of different linguistic purposes.

*In comparison with 'low tech' equivalents:*

This method of working provided significant advantages for the students over the 'low tech' equivalents of having bits of paper to physically manoeuvre. For the teacher, during preparation time, the percentage of tedious manual labour (all that cutting and pasting!) should be significantly reduced.

2. We worked through two text editing challenges. One involved deciding what other modifications to make in a text in which the main protagonist was to be assigned a different gender, from female to male, a surprisingly complex process that encouraged us to explore issues of culture-specific (here, gender-specific) behaviour and language. Another text editing puzzle asked us to improve the cohesion of a short text which lacked all internal references. This too was non-trivial, providing a range of syntactical, grammatical and lexical challenges. These activities, too, can be adapted for other purposes. For example, word processor-based activities involving transposing a text's style/register would be of use both to teacher trainees and EFL students, e.g. those preparing for Paper 3 in FCE and CAE exams.

*In comparison with 'low tech' equivalents:*

For text editing, the use of the medium of word processing software on computer clearly provides massive advantages over the 'low tech' equivalent of editing on paper, so this is an activity indisputably best suited to an IT context.

3. Another technique Clive used was to switch writers around during the production of a text, with the participants physically changing seats to 'collaborate' on texts. Firstly, we completed a series of sentences relating to our own ideas about using CALL. We switched back and forth between our original computer and a neighbouring computer. Secondly, we completed the missing parts of an amusing narrative. As we finished each stage, we were moved on round the room, from computer to computer. Clive kept turn-taking to a brisk — if not frantic! — pace, and mental sparks illuminated many parts of the computer room. It was, in short, a lot of fun.

The general flow of ideas in the texts was structured by the outlines provided by Clive. At the same time, however, the actual content of the ideas written in by different participants varied widely. Although I have described what we were doing as 'collaborating' on texts, that is somewhat misleading. Collaborative writing implies a planned progression of ideas, but in reality, the writing process we were engaged

in was quite different. It was more like a natural conversation, where each turn is made up on the spot in response to the content of previous turns, and mediated by the turn-takers' own personal agendas.

*In comparison with 'low tech' equivalents:*

A close 'low tech' equivalent (and brilliant activity) is the "Written two-way role-play" — essentially a standard conflict role-play done in writing on paper rather than orally — described by Christine Frank and Mario Rinvoluceri in *Grammar in Action*, 1983, Pergamon Press. In fact, written two-way role-plays, story 'fleshing-out' activities, and other similar creative writing activities, are very well suited to this kind of word processor/computer medium. Doing things in writing gives people the chance to reflect more than is normally possible in speech. The digital nature of the resulting text product also expedites archiving and sharing, and permits efficient post-mortem analysis of language used. The technique could serve as a useful pre-cursor to network-based text communication technologies such as synchronous text-based chatting.



## Summary

Targeting what can be done with word processors and presentation software is useful, as this type of software is fairly ubiquitous, and so should be common to most teaching situations involving computers. Moreover, lessons learned from this session could easily be adapted for use in teaching contexts with severely limited numbers of computers. The techniques Clive presented are easy to use, but effective. They are multi-purpose techniques that can be applied to many different areas of language learning.



## Further study

A [PDF version of Clive's Word document](#) can be downloaded from his Web site at:

[http://www.liv.ac.uk/%7Ecnewton/Word%20processing/  
The%20Place%20of%20the%20Word%20Processor%20and%20MS%20Power  
Point%20in%20Teacher%20Training.pdf](http://www.liv.ac.uk/%7Ecnewton/Word%20processing/The%20Place%20of%20the%20Word%20Processor%20and%20MS%20Power%20Point%20in%20Teacher%20Training.pdf)



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