

ITAC Joint Request

Innovation in Foreign Language Instruction with Flash Multimedia

The College of Liberal Arts Instructional Technology Services

Texas Language Technology Center (TLTC)

The Division of Instructional Innovation and Assessment (DIIA)

We request \$65,000 to develop a basic reusable Flash instructional tool for foreign language video/audio-based materials that will be easily adapted for a variety of languages and pedagogical contexts (beginning to advanced language courses). The main goal is to develop and implement state-of-the-art foreign language materials for UT students, especially materials in less commonly taught languages underserved by commercial publishers (e.g., Persian, Arabic, Hindi, etc). This award will allow the partners to update previously developed materials as well as to integrate various foreign language video-based projects currently under development.

For the past decade, LAITS and TLTC have explored innovative ways to use pedagogical videos to immerse students in foreign languages, and help them spend more time interacting with the target language. In fact, short video is central to the established French lower-division websites (*Français interactif* <http://www.laits.utexas.edu/fi/> and *Tex's French Grammar* <http://www.laits.utexas.edu/tex/>) as well as the new German lower-division online curriculum (*Deutsch in Blick* <http://tltc.la.utexas.edu/dib/> and *Grimm Grammar* <http://tltc.la.utexas.edu/gg/index.html>). The short video format facilitates the use of student subjects to bridge the psychological gap between student and subject matter. For example, *Français interactif* and *Deutsch in Blick* both employ videos of study abroad participants in France and Germany who speak directly to students back home at UT. The use of “amateur video” of students interacting with native speakers frames these curricula in terms of the student perspective.

As innovative and effective as these video-based programs continue to be, they are swiftly being replaced by a new generation of foreign language tools that takes advantage of video in ways not possible a few years ago. TLTC has recently identified an important trend in foreign languages at UT (and across the nation)—*the use of Flash technology for the delivery of short pedagogical videos*. While the use of web-based audio and video resources has been standard fare for a decade as noted above, the convergence towards a set of innovative functionalities facilitated by Flash is new and highly promising. In fact, at present there are six major foreign language projects under development at UT that all employ Flash video: *Aswaat Arabiyya* (Arabic), American Sign Language, *Conversa Brasileira* (Portuguese), Beginning Spanish; *Rockin' Russian*, and Professional Development Modules for Foreign Language Instructors. Despite their obvious similarities, developers and programmers undertook each project in relative isolation. Thus, the goal of this initiative is to draw together these individual projects to derive a set of best practices and a common code for the use of Flash video for foreign language instruction.

An analysis of these various projects reveals three main similarities: 1) high quality short-form videos (approximately two minutes in length); 2) textual glosses or transcripts synced with the videos (e.g., captions, pop-ups, sidebars); and 3) interactive exercises keyed to the videos (e.g., exercises that force users to attend to visual and auditory information in innovative ways). Flash technology is at the core of these projects, making these components possible.

The newer foreign language projects all recognize that shorter, more focused video segments initiate more user interaction and avoid passive reception of material. Moreover, these tools all employ *enriched video*, that is, video enriched by other forms of textual and visual information displayed in multiple formats. For example, the ***Rockin' Russian*** project guides learners through a series of activities based on Russian music videos. To make the videos more comprehensible, students may choose to watch the videos with a variety of different captions: Russian, English colloquial and English literal (word-by-word translations). Similarly, the ***Conversa Brasileira*** videos employ pop up vocabulary words cued to the audio track that appear on screen. Clicking on a pop up stops the video and gives the viewer more grammatical and lexical information about the language. Such innovations cry out for further testing. Can learners process multiple channels of information—visual image, textual information, spoken work. And more generally, how much information is too much?

A different kind of innovation is demonstrated by ***Aswaat Arabiyya***. Based on hundreds of short video clips licensed from Al-Jazeera television, this Arabic program seeks to improve students' listening comprehension. After watching a video, students attempt exercises that are cued to parts of the video. In other words, different parts of the exercises automatically play different parts of the video, helping to focus students' attention. Students can also play the video at different speeds without distorting the audio quality of the spoken Arabic. This innovation is nothing short of a breakthrough for foreign language instructional materials and deserves to be widely disseminated across language departments.

We request \$75,000 in one time ITAC funding for TLTC and DIIA to construct a foreign language Flash interface that would incorporate these various innovations (captions, pop ups, speed adjustment, interactive exercises, etc), and be able to support wide scale usage via hosting on specialized media servers secured and maintained by LAITS.

½ FTE Flash Programmer: \$35,000

Digital multimedia post-production support: \$25,000

Enhanced server and network support for Flash: \$5,000