Some common computer uses

- Computers are widely used in support of foreign language teaching (FLT). For example, they
  - provide access to foreign language newspapers, radio, and TV programs through the world-wide web
  - connect language learners with native speakers through email/chat
  - support multimedia presentations providing an audio-visual foreign language context
  - enable the learner to search for real-life examples in electronic corpora

- Essentially, such computer usage helps language learners experience a foreign language and culture in a more direct, real-life fashion.

Language Tutoring Systems

Overarching question: How computers can help provide foreign language learners with experiences that are:

- richer,
- more personalized, and
- more effective?

First Language Acquisition

Second language learning is very different from **first language acquisition**

- Babies & young children need no instruction
- Researchers disagree on how much of language learning ability
  - is innate, i.e., a biological endowment
  - emerges from experience, i.e., a rich social and physical environment.

First Language Acquisition

**Stages of First Language Acquisition**

**Typical stages of first language acquisition:**

- Babies play with making sounds and around six months, typical babies begin to **babble**
  - use sequences of consonants and vowels, e.g., bababa
- Quickly start learning words by first birthday
- Form simple 2-word utterances by the time they turn 2
- Voice & understand complex sentences by 3
- Continue acquiring words & complex language structures over next 9 or 10 years
  - Some structures, e.g., passives, added relatively late

Essentially the same pattern across all languages and cultures (with some individual variation)

A child can be a **native speaker** of multiple first languages, acquiring each of them without explicit instruction

Second Language Acquisition

**Awareness of language forms**

Adults do not automatically acquire a second language

- Even after living in a foreign country for a long time, listening to & talking in a foreign language there
- Research since the 90s has shown that **awareness** of language forms and rules is important for an adult learner to successfully acquire a foreign language.
  - e.g., the use of the **articles** the and a in English is difficult to learn
    - especially for those whose native language does not make use of articles (Chinese, Russian, etc.)
  - Mastery requires awareness of categories such as **mass nouns** (e.g., rice) & **generics** (e.g., milk in I like to drink milk)

CALL can provide an opportunity to enhance awareness of a language’s rules
Needs of second language learners

- The time a student can spend with an instructor/tutor typically is very limited
  - Work on form and grammar is often de-emphasized and confined to homework
  - The time with the instructor is used for purely communicative activities
- Learners have relatively few opportunities to gain awareness of forms & rules and receive individual feedback

Recent British National Student Survey found:
- “students are notably less positive about assessment and feedback on their assignments than about other aspects of their learning experience”

Basic uses of computers for CALL

Lots of general possibilities for using a computer to learn:
- multimedia presentations
- online dictionaries with fast access
- extensive databases of information
- digital audio files
- digital videos of people speaking in L2
  - Digital advantages: easy playback, easy isolation of problematic spots, etc.
- interactive games & puzzles
- exercises for students to complete

The last two examples potentially require sophisticated natural language processing

CALL systems

Multiple choice
Computers can explicitly store knowledge about words or grammar necessary to complete a specific exercise

1. Fred lives _____ Mill Street, doesn't he?
   - in
   - on
   - at

2. My father was born _____ Christmas Eve.
   - at
   - on
   - in

3. Come here _____ once! I need your help right now!
   - at
   - on
   - in

(Source: http://www.eslcafe.com/quiz/prep3.html)

Multiple choice exercises work well for practicing or testing specific choices of forms or meanings
- include so-called distractors as incorrect choices

An opportunity for CALL

- The situation seems like an excellent opportunity for developing Computer-Aided Language Learning (CALL) tools to
  - provide individual feedback on learner errors and
  - foster learner awareness of relevant language forms and categories.
- But existing CALL systems which offer exercises
  - typically are limited to uncontextualized multiple choice, point-and-click, or simple form filling, and
  - feedback usually is limited to yes/no or letter-by-letter matching of the string with a pre-stored answer.

Basic uses of computers for CALL

Concordancers

- Take a text and create a concordance = display of words in context.
- Concordancers help learners understand how a given word is used.
  - For example, is the word data in English singular or plural?

contract to supply voice and giving control over how much humanists to fit their special 27 mm. But these data data data communications within the Tunnel is sent over the network to the software, rather are for fourth-year crabs.

CALL systems

Fill-in-the-blank

Putting questions on the web or another computer-based platform makes it possible to provide immediate feedback

Other possible exercises include:
- pull-down menus listing the choices
- fill-in-the-blank (FIB) texts: a word in a sentence is erased & the learner must type in the missing word
  - also referred to as cloze exercises
  - often include a fallback case to respond to any unexpected input
    - i.e., canned text responses
Early CALL systems

**Frame-based systems** “match student answers with a set of correct and incorrect answers stored in a frame”
- These systems differ in their strategies for selecting questions, but they rely on preset questions and answers
- In principle, could be used with NLP techniques

Many also feature a dynamic **sequencing of instruction**

Problems with frame-based systems

Frame-based systems are fairly simple and generally do not involve much linguistic knowledge
- There is no deep understanding of question domain
- They generally only match answers with questions, but language use is more varied
- There is not much tailoring to particular student needs

Language awareness

Semantic generalizations

More broadly: refer to classes instead of individual strings
- Consider fill-in-the-blank exercise modeled on a German exercise in Trude Heil’s E-Tutor system:

(2) John works in New York City, but his family lives in Boston. On the weekend, he drives home. Fortunately, John has a new ___________________.

Different options for correctly filling in this blank:
- **synonyms**: words which mean the same thing, at least in certain contexts: e.g., car & vehicle
- Other **lexical semantic relations** between words:
  - hyponym: using a more specific term (hyponym), e.g., pick-up, SUV, or hybrid car
  - the more general term car is the hypernym

Linear systems

A linear system does the following:
1. poses a question
2. accepts an answer
3. informs the student as to whether or not the answer was correct

⇒ Regardless of the correctness of the answer, linear systems proceed to the next question.

- **Branching systems** select a question of appropriate difficulty based on performance thus far

Language awareness

Making generalizations

What happens when teachers must specify all options for answering an exercise?

1. Today is November 5. What date is tomorrow?

   Tomorrow is ________________.

Possible correct answers (among others):

- Nov., the 6th
- the sixth
- November, the sixth
- 6. Nov.
- 6. Nov.
- 6. Nov.
- 11/06
- 06.11.

⇒ Many different ways to misspell any of these options
⇒ Many different possible incorrect answers

Language awareness

Morphological generalizations

Additionally, a single word in a language can show up in different forms.
- e.g., citation form or lemma of bring is to bring
  - Also realized as bringing, brought, bring, or brings
  - The different word forms and their function are investigated in morphology

⇒ Other languages feature richer inventories of forms
  - e.g., 6 forms for one of the verbs meaning to be in Spanish: soy, eres, es, somos, sois, son
  - Plus over a dozen other tenses and moods

We would need to spell out the many different forms for each exercise in a CALL system
Language awareness

Syntactic generalizations
Consider exercises where learner can enter multiple words
- the various word order possibilities result in additional, systematic variation
- syntax identifies different word order possibilities & the forms words have to appear in

(3) John, the radio is much too loud. Please

(4) a. turn down the radio.
   b. turn the radio down.

Many non-English languages allow freer word order
- capturing all possible word orders is infeasible
Linguistic generalizations can compactly specify the expected correct or incorrect answers

Adding linguistic analysis
Tokenization
To get lemmas (or anything else), we need to find the words (or tokens)
- A text is simply a very long list of letters
- tokenization (or word segmentation) = task of finding tokens in a text
Why is this challenging?
1. **Covering ambiguity**: two or more characters may be combined to form one word or not
   - Writing systems of many languages do not use spaces between words, e.g., 中华
   - Option #1: segment as two words of one character each, meaning will hurt
   - Option #2: segment it as a single word of two characters, meaning门户
   - Context determines the segmentation

Adding linguistic analysis
Tokenization
(2)
2. **Overlapping ambiguity**: a given character may either combine with the previous or with the next word
   - 布什在谈话中指出
     - Meaning changes depending on which word the second to last character is part of
       - 布什在谈话中指出
       - Bush at talk middle-finger out
       - 布什在谈话中指出
       - Bush at talk middle point-out
     - NB: In Chinese, only the second segmentation option is grammatical

Adding linguistic analysis
Tokenization
(3)
Even for English, spaces are not exact:
- e.g., inasmuch as and inssofar as, in spite of should be single tokens
1. **Compound nouns** such as flu shot:
   (5) a. I got my flu shot yesterday.
   b. I got my salary yesterday.
2. **Contractions**: e.g., I'm, cannot, or gonna
   - They should likely be treated on a par with I am, can not, and going to
Automatic tokenizers typically have long lists of known words & abbreviations, plus (finite-state) rules for subregularities

Intelligent CALL (ICALL)
Intelligent CALL (ICALL) focuses on using linguistics and natural language processing to make CALL better.
- ICALL can also involve integrating authentic text into exercises, usually for more advanced learners
- ICALL involves providing linguistic analysis to handle real learner input
2. Lexical stem lookup
   - Unambiguous part-of-speech (POS): e.g., claustrophobic is only an adjective
   - Ambiguous POS: e.g., can
     - auxiliary: The baby can walk.
     - full verb: I can tuna for a living.
   - a noun: Pass me that can of beer, please!
   - Words not in the lexicon: a big problem for computers

3. Morphology the form of words
   - Markings (e.g., suffixes added to stem endings)
     - e.g., the -ed indicated past tense
   - Inflectional suffixes: information such as tense or agreement (e.g., -s on third person singular verbs)
   - Derivational affixes (e.g., -er turns verbs into nouns: walk – walker).
     - Automatic POS-taggers use suffix analysis as a fallback step
     - If a word has not been seen before, suffix analysis determines the most likely POS

Parser-Based ICALL

Parser-Based ICALL systems generally fall along the following lines:
- System presents the learner with an exercise
- Learner inputs an answer, possibly with errors, i.e., a potentially ill-formed sentence
- The parser processes this sentence
  - Identifying where, if at all, it was incorrect
  - The nature of the error
- Feedback is then presented to the student

We’ll look at two example systems:
- e-Tutor (German Tutor): Heift & Nicholson
- TAGARELA: Amaral & Meurers

e-Tutor (Heift & Nicholson 2001) is used at Simon Fraser University to teach German to students; it is:
- general, i.e., allows for any native language (L1)
- able to capture different kinds of errors … because the exercises are very constrained

Student input is put through the following modules and stops with feedback when the first error is encountered
1. String match: if the input matches a pre-defined correct answer, we know it’s good.
   - Prevents time-consuming analysis for perfect answers
2. Punctuation check: is any punctuation missing?
More on system architecture

3. Spell check: run an off-the-shelf spell checker on the input and get the **lemmas**
   - Idea: eliminate the really basic errors.
   - Problem: sometimes a “misspelled” word is a sign of lack of grammatical competence, e.g. **runned**
4. Example check: are the right words being used?
5. Missing word check: are any words missing?
6. Extra word check: are any words added?
   - These 3 steps (example, missing word, and extra word checks) all are based on the notion that the exercise has **pre-defined** all the acceptbal words

Dictation

Student hears a sentence in German and types it in. They are told if they are correct, and if not, why.

http://zif.spz.tu-darmstadt.de/jg-06-2/beitrag/heift2.htm

Word Order Practice

Take all the given words and arrange them into a sentence.

Fill-in-the-Blank

Give the learner a lemma or choice of lemmas, and they have to fill in the blank.
Build a Sentence

Use all the given words (lemmas) and create a grammatical German sentence.

**Guten Tag, Trude!**

Füllen Sie einen Satz mit den folgenden Wörtern.

ADVANCED LEARNER OUTPUT: “There is an error in gender with the subject.”

**TAGARELA**

TAGARELA is a system for individualized instruction of Portuguese at Ohio State

- It features standard exercises, as found in foreign language workbooks
- NLP processing is used to detect spelling, morphological, syntactic, and semantic errors

A student model is kept to track performance and to choose appropriate feedback
  - An instruction model allows the instructor to state what is important

**Demand-driven architecture**

Different from the e-Tutor, TAGARELA works in a demand-driven fashion; the analysis manager:
- receives input from the student
- gather the necessary information from:
  - instruction model
  - student model
- decides on the best processing strategy:
  - which NLP modules to call
  - in which order (as opposed to linearly)
- calls NLP modules to process input, producing an input annotated with linguistic properties
- hands the annotated input to the feedback manager

**Sources of information for CALL systems**

1. Language/linguistic properties
2. Exercise information
3. Information about the learner

**Learning modeling** generally includes two types of information:

1. Learner properties which are more or less permanent
   - e.g., gender, native language, learning style preferences
2. Dynamic record of learner performance so far: whether a learner successfully used particular words/structures

Both types of information are relevant for feedback

- e.g., native language (L1) of a learner influences words & constructions used & mistakes made
  - Positive and negative **L1-transfer**
  - Negative transfer: many native speakers of languages such as Chinese or Czech find the & a difficult

- L1s do not include articles of the kind found in English
- Tutoring system should provide feedback on article misuse for learners with such native languages
Modeling the learner

Obtaining learner information

How do we obtain dynamic record of learner performance?

> The system needs to draw *inferences* from the learner’s interaction with the system.
> - Need to abstract to general linguistic properties & classes which a learner answer provides evidence for
>   - e.g., whether a learner answer contained a finite verb, provided evidence for subject-verb agreement, etc.
> - After seeing answers with instances of a particular property, we can infer that the learner has mastered it
>   - e.g., deprioritize feedback on it in the future
> - Models may help *sequence teaching material*
>   - e.g., by guiding the learner to additional material on concepts not yet mastered

The WERTi System

Working with English Real-Texts: An Intelligent Workbook for English

WERTi is an “intelligent automatic workbook, providing an unlimited number of activities designed to foster awareness of English grammatical forms and functions”

> Learners select a topic which fits their interests
> Webpages are returned, which learners interact to learn about, e.g., prepositions
>   - Learners can choose to see prepositions in color; click on them; or fill in blanks

Crucially, the exercises are *generated* on the fly

> Pre-existing NLP technology (e.g., a POS tagger) is used to spot the relevant categories

The REAP Project

Reader-Specific Lexical Practice for Improved Reading Comprehension

In the REAP system:

> Teachers have target vocabulary items
> REAP finds appropriate texts for learners, based on their individual profile
>   - Learners get individualized vocabulary practice from authentic web texts

There are several challenges in extracting text for reading

> Each extracted text is analyzed for its “syntactic features, readability, length, and the occurrence of target vocabulary”
> Information retrieval and statistical NLP techniques are used to find appropriate texts

GLOSSER

GLOSSER facilitates dictionary look-up

> System uses lemmatization and morphological analysis
> Look-up is 100 times faster (Nerbonne 2003)
  - Otherwise very challenging for highly-inflected languages