Happiness and disappointment on our way to heaven…

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The next lines of text will try to give an overview and some critical remarks on our experiences with ICT in teaching-learning and constructing-producing FL learning materials during the last fifteen years (as a teacher, as an author, as a coordinator of methods of FL, as a coordinator of research about ICT-enhanced methods of FLL (foreign language learning), as the coordinator of a big FL-contest by means of the internet[1]).

Our way to heaven - as we thought ICT should bring the solution of all our problems - started by trials with DOS-products sustaining existing methods of French business correspondance, went over a very succesful testsoftware reflecting exactly our exams, continued with an excellent product in the form of a CDi that was a big commercial failure, experienced the possibilities and the limits of ICT assisted FL learning for youngsters, sees now heaven in a cdrom or browser driven FL course for higher techical staff of enterprises, testing in the meanwhile a large MC-database for learners of FFL (French as a foreign language).

<u>Which obstacles did we meet?</u>

Software and ICT offer some interesting possibilities for
- Vocabulary training
- Grammar exercises
- Imitation of pronunciation
- Tracking and (limited) remedial teaching, especially if good help files are given, e.g. an e-dictionary adapted for e-learning

but have serious intrinsic restrictions:
- No written creative texts can be corrected automatically
- No written creative interaction
- No oral production can be recognised or corrected
- No oral creative interaction, i.e. dialogue
- Limited possibilities for voice and sound transmission by means of the internet
- Limited possibilities for images and movie sequences… (too little band width)

and even meet a lot of environmental problems:
- Haves and havenots
- Not enough computers or terminals at our disposal (often they are out of service)
- No or not enough support (for hard- and even software)
- A lack of flexibility (see the flexibility of traditional schoolbooks: price, place)
- A lack of compatibility (different releases of O.S., browsers…)
- Not user friendly enough
- No computer reading strategies
- Little added value…
- Problems of compatibility with the overall learning management system

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[1] See www.luc.ac.be/cttl and www.olyfran.com.

Which requirements does a good ICT product have to meet?

A series of elements are given (actual possibilities of the equipment, technical state of the local equipment, local help…; quality of the programmes, software, methods) and cannot be changed by language teachers.
But a lot of others are in our own hands:
- Environmental elements (machines, O.S., browsers…)
- Maximum compatibility
- Easy accessibility = user friendliness (on-line help, clear-simple instructions…; in-built didactic vocabulary, language and culture grammar)
- Real added value or even irreplacibility (content and style)(compared to traditional learning materials)
- Really multimedia (text, sound-voice, picture-drawing-movie sequences)
- Adequate content (needs analysis= communicative situations > corpus composition and analysis > didactic scenario > progressive elaboration and continuous return possibilities > authentic language and environments…)
- (Young and) changing style (compared to all these atttractive computer games)

More teacher independant learning:
"Learner is an economic being =
he is continuously looking for the best results with the least effort."

1. Learners have to learn how to learn autonomously (discipline, organisation…)
   1.1. Clear traject book
   1.2. Regular follow-up
   1.3. Intermediate and final tests clearly reflecting the learning activities

2. Teachers have to learn how to:
   1.1. Prepare the learning process
   1.2. Guide-coach the learning process.
   New tasks:
   - Conceive challenging learning materials in multidisciplinary teams (e.g. movie producers… + linguistic-didactic specialists)
   - Rethink their role during the learning activity:
     - Assist individual learners with problems
     - Organise creative activities (computers cannot) and give (creative) feedback (computers cannot)

An ICT (enhanced) FL method can only succeed if:

1 for the learner:

- the method meets the normal standards of a good FL method (clear objectives as result of a needs analysis, authentic language, didactic scenario, progressive elaboration, authentic situations)
- ICT gives a real added value (text, sound and voice, images of all kind)
- ICT is not only complementary but is an integrative part of the method (ICT as the only support of the part of the method brought by means of ICT)

- the ICT enhanced part of the course is technically (extremely user friendly) and stylisticly (young and changing) comparable to the products of the normal consumor market
- learning by ICT is a part of the learning culture of the institute, so learners have the necessary discipline and organisation (learner's autonomy) and the school organisation is conceived for an integrative use of ICT. Mostly learners, certainly in the beginning, need a regular follow-up (tests clearly reflecting the learning activities), a clearly elaborated learning traject (a kind of agenda with their learning tasks and final objectives and the way they will be evaluated).

2   for the teacher-author:

- he gets a fair fee for his work
- different competences can be brought together to make a technically and stylisticly competitive product (see the list of collaborators of a picture)
- the problem of copyrights can be solved in a sufficient way

3   for the teacher-coach

- he doesn't have to fear for his job
- he is trained to integrate ICT-applications in his course
- he has easily access to the necessary technical equipment without disturbing the school organisation
- he can use an integrated method where ICT takes an essential and irreplaceable part

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