Googleries, oui oui oui!

Katherine Watson
Coastline Community College
Fountain Valley, California
United States
Bizarrissime@gmail.com

Abstract: Google.com has risen to worldwide prominence as the pre-eminently visited site on the Internet. Besides having developed simply an uncluttered search engine, along with an unintimidating interface, Google is in continuous creative progress, conceiving an increasingly multi-faceted set of Web-based products facilitating and expediting access to audio, video, or print data at any time anywhere and in multiple tongues. Serendipitously enough for students of language and culture online, these *Google tools* comprise user-friendly enhancements that demonstrably facilitate learning. At Coastline Community College, twenty self-selected learners of French language and culture online have participated in a project nicknamed "Googleries", in which training and encouragement have been afforded in seven freely available "Googleries"; these comprise some of the most easily accessible Google tools designed and developed in the target language to enrich study. Besides learning vocabulary and grammar, Coastline *Googleries* project participants have acquired a new awareness of alternative linguistic pragmatics, worldviews, and technical skills.

Introduction

With its broad range of freely available, easy-to-use tools, Google.com has risen to worldwide prominence as the pre-eminently visited site on the Internet, and its parent company has piggybacked upon the original notion of developing simply an uncluttered search engine an increasingly multi-faceted set of Web-based products facilitating and expediting access to audio, video, or print data at any time anywhere and in multiple tongues. Serendipitously enough for students of language and culture online, these *Google tools* comprise a user-friendly set of utilities that can enhance learning. That is, while it has been claimed that the language of an electronic interface does not affect the learnability of material being transmitted online (Melton, 2006), it has also become apparent that something more than words alone is inculcated into those who would employ Web-based utilities in languages other than English (Eune and Lee, 2009). Thus, it would seem that, as Green (2011), among others, has maintained, the explicitly present language used for information transmission online combines with the implicitly present language of the electronic interface to deliver enriched meaning enveloped in a cultural context.

At Coastline Community College, demographically diverse learners of French language and culture online have been offered various Google resources in French and English as no-cost enhancements to their course materials. With no required textbooks, no required meetings in a brick-and-mortar classroom, and no set "due dates" for assignments except the last day of a semester, online studies in French language and culture have for nearly twenty years been made available to overwhelmed overstressed students as cheap, expedient alternatives to the traditional.

Promoting Coastline student access to native language speaker-conceived and –presented versions of free-of-cost, user-friendly Google products was initially designed at once to decrease institutional costs and to increase convenience, but additional serendipitous consequences have come about. Indeed, in an effort to demonstrate the practical educational utility of Google's various multi-lingual "tools" in a French language course delivered online, seven of those tools were selected for their ease of access and linguistic transparency, as well as their implicit transmission of a francophone worldview. That is, students were invited to volunteer in a research project dubbed *Googleries*, in which native francophone-developed Google utilities (called *Googleries* for this project) were to be exploited to answer certain research questions: Could Google tools prove effective in helping to teach linguistic pragmatics, alternative worldviews, and technical skills, along with grammar and vocabulary in a new language online?

After a year of work with the tools, despite financial constraints, learners online at Coastline did indeed profit from francophone *Googleries* to apprehend things technical and social, as well as linguistic.

Background

Since 1976, Coastline Community College, in Fountain Valley, California, has concentrated on the flexible and the alternative, currently offering hundreds of courses online and on television. Notably, a course in French language and culture was the first completely-online academic offering to be made in the three-campus Coast Community College District, early in the 1990s. And happily enough for these students, the notions of free accessibility, collaboration, and shared iterative success that underlie the Open Source and Open Courseware movements have grown in popularity just as Coastliners' needs have evolved. Thus, following the philosophy of Linux creator Linus Torvalds that "there should be open-source everything" (Albro, 2011), many francophone institutions and Anglophone interest groups have offered free-of-cost access to information, ideas, designs, and even academic resources in the interest of "opening up knowledge across the world", as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology states at its Open Courseware (OCW Initiative) Website. Profiting from free access to Open Courseware materials, as well as to the diverse data made available through the French government's Ministry of Culture and its attendant *médiathèques*, and to materials housed with the *Organisation intergouvernementale de la francophonie* and such Africa-based institutions as OSIRIS (*Observatoire sur les Systèmes d'Information, les Réseaux, et les Inforoutes au Sénégal*), Coastline students of French language and culture have been presented diverse data for discussion, interaction, and analysis. Coastline students of French language and culture

have for nearly twenty years been interweaving the international into their college's own Open Source-based course management interface.

With the rise of Google.com as an international player in the Open Source arena, along with Coastline's abiding interest in keeping everything Internet as free and simple as possible, students been able to profit from genuinely French-produced materials to expedite their learning.

Methodology

The fact that Coastline Community College has striven to hew to the Open Source promise since its earliest days of putting educational materials online has facilitated, if not expedited, students' access to a broad range of materials from around the world. In addition, the entry of the perpetually innovative Google into the international educational arena has permitted California Coastliners to engage easily, without technical barriers, with thinkers elsewhere. Being able to exploit information through one common set of Google tools has flattened the technological learning curve, making it possible for students to concentrate more on learning and sharing subject matter knowledge than on acquiring only the technological expertise necessary to access that knowledge. And even so, Coastliners have attained with the aid of Google tools a new facility with technology and its terminology in more than one language.

Because Coastline has come to be known locally and internationally as Francophile-friendly, having been invited as the only American institution to the first *Fête de l'Internet* in the 1990's, as one of the few American schools to engage in the first interactive meeting of the World Economic Forum, and as the first to enjoy the bilingual (English and French) options for virtual classroom interactivity offered through the Canadian *Classe Branchée* experiment, it is reasonable to expect that Coastline students of French language and culture would also be among the first to be able to profit from both the Open Source movement and the customizable, internationalized free-access resources available from Google.

During 2011, seven Google tools, dubbed *Googleries*, were made available to Coastline French onliners in a project given the same name (*Googleries*). Notably, in terms of technological vocabulary acquisition and interface design (Marcus and Gould, 2000), all seven utilities are accessible in both English and French and have been conceived and developed by native speakers in each language. The student participants in the project were all adults who were comfortable with technology, who enjoyed high-speed Internet access at home, and who could understand and use both English and French without difficulty, as demonstrated in reading comprehension and grammar tests, as well as in writing. They ranged in age from 18 to 83, and all had traveled to at least one francophone country; they were at ease with reading, writing, and hearing the target language and they demonstrated competence in doing research in more than one language, as well.

Starting in late January, 2011, twenty self-selected online learners of French language and culture were given instructions and offered hands-on practice at Coastline with *Googleries*, comprising seven Google utilities. That is, training was offered in Google Gmail account set-up, using a French interface; Google Chrome navigator installation and practice; iGoogle homepage customization; Google search via alternative linguistic extensions (e.g., fr, de, vn, es); Google interaction options, including audio and image sharing, as well as GooglePlus; Google "knowledge" sharing tools (e.g., Blogger, Knol, Reader); and how to use Google presentation materials (e.g., documents, spreadsheets, presentations, forms). Examples and printed instructions in English and French were distributed and posted online at Coastline course Websites and at free resources-sharing centers (http://www.epsilen.com/watsonk and http://www.slideshare.net/Bizarrissime) for analysis, discussion, and applicability to students' particular penchants. Questions of *what, how, why*, and *what happens* of each Google tool were presented for discussion, and students were invited to share their experiences and/or alternative suggestions.

To summarize, Coastline online learners of French were prompted to communicate via a francophone Google Gmail interface, enhanced by instant messaging; they surfed the 'Net using Google Chrome in French; they customized their own iGoogle homepages; studied with the aid of Google Documents and GoogleBooks; and shared data in Google Plus Circles. Additional information-sharing tools included Knols and Blogger blogs, as well as the image repository comprising Picasa.

Results

The twenty students of French language and culture enrolled in the *Googleries* Google tools experiments online at Coastline Community College participated to varying degrees. Unhappily, four of the twenty students who signed up to participate in the projects reported no results of work with any of the Google resources during the first sixteen weeks of the two-semester experiment, and they used only G-Mail in a desultory manner during the next sixteen weeks. These four individuals produced a total of 400 words or less of French each, and they reported neither an iGoogle homepage set-up nor any other Google tool activity, stating that they were "frustrated" and that they had all decided that perhaps a classroom environment might work better for foreign language learning. Happily, however, the remaining sixteen student participants in the project did share and report results in all seven Google tools categories.

- *Google Gmail*: Like an increasing number of institutions, and some 14 million learners worldwide, Coastline Community College has adopted free Google apps communications (http://www.google.com/apps/intl/en/edu/gmail.html). Every student is encouraged to use a no-cost Coast Community College District-provided Gmail-based account @student.cccd.edu. In addition, students of French are encouraged to cast their accounts in a francophone interface for the same set of apps (http://www.google.com/apps/intl/fr/edu/gmail.html). All twenty students participating in the *Googleries* project did set up francophone-interfaced Coastline Gmail accounts; eight students created personal Gmail accounts as well during the project period. Notably, twelve students reported consulting their

Coastline francophone *messagerie* more than once a week through the project period and reported using instant messaging, audio, and video, too. These twelve students each produced between 800 and 1000 words every week in French e-mail messaging during the thirty-two weeks of the project, totaling 25600 and 32000 words in thirty-two weeks; an additional two students produced an average of 9600 words each, and two others produced about 100 words/week, for a total of 3200 words in French. Interestingly, not all of the twelve most communicative e-mailers were among the most successful overall in their attainment of things francophone. Four of these twelve active e-mailers, like the four who never set up iGoogle pages or Google.fr searches, remarked that they preferred e-mail over all other communications, that they found the Gmail instant messaging to be convenient, and that they were "too used to" such services as Microsoft Office or Flickr, YouTube, or Facebook to want even to experiment with Google docs, Picasa, Talk, or Plus. These students, along with all sixteen others, did, however, master the francophone interface and vocabulary of Gmail *à la française*, demonstrating competent use of such terms as *boîte aux letters électronique, destinataire, expéditeur, pièce jointe,* and the like, complete with accent marks.

- *Google Chrome*: The Google-conceived/developed Web browser for PCs and Macs was first made available to the public in 2008; by 2011, it had achieved the status as the second most-used browser behind Microsoft's Explorer. With a simple white homepage headed by tabs indicating recently visited sites, Chrome updates itself automatically; beneficially for speakers or learners of languages other than English, the browser is quick to download any of more than 50 languages. Sixteen of the twenty Coastline students engaged in the *Googleries* project set up and used Google Chrome, installing it from the French http://www.google.fr/chrome. More than half of these students stated that they "noticed hardly any difference" between having a francophone v. an Anglophone interface in their Web browser, raising a question about how much of learning a new language, culture, worldview, and way of doing things might be subtle, almost unseen, implicit. Indeed, eight of the sixteen installers of the francophone Google Chrome stated that they used this browser in French for more reasons than project participation alone. Four students, two of them the most active francophone Gmail users and two others the least active in Gmail, made explicit remarks that the francophone Chrome "seemed somehow cleaner and faster" than any Anglophone browser they had used and that it "seemed to give faster results in French", too. All sixteen students commented that the tabbed browsing feature of Chrome "made it a lot quicker and easier to go back to" pages/sites that had been consulted and even to compare search results from diverse linguistic bases, such as French and English, French and Vietnamese, French and Spanish and English, or French and Russian. One of the sixteen students contrasted time and ease of Chrome installation v. the time and ease of Explorer and Firefox installation; he remarked that the Chrome process "seemed almost instantaneous compared to Explorer" and that it was "slightly faster" than Firefox, the Open Source browser upon which Google Chrome was originally based. Installing and

using Google Chrome proved successful. Interface differences between Google Chrome in English v. French seemed to be so subtle as to be barely apparent.

- *iGoogle*: As Kharbach (2011) has described it, "iGoogle (http://www.google.com/ig) is a very personalized homepage that allows users much more flexibility to customize, add, and delete elements and gadgets and place key info all in one handy single page." The result of this for educators, claims Kharbach, is that "we will no longer run after knowledge online; it will come after us instead." The sixteen Coastline students of French language and culture who each set up an iGoogle page remarked that the set-up was easy, that being able to display two clocks in two different timezones was useful, that seeing the news from the world and locally all in one place is "enlightening", that setting up an *agenda*, or to-do list, "can be helpful for more than just French", and getting words or quotations or even factoids of the day was "fun". In addition, the iGoogle's summary of recent E-mail made it "easy to see what's new", stated four of these sixteen students. The calendar and weather features are "interesting and a good idea" (students noted in particular that seeing temperatures in Celsius and francophone weather (*météo*) displays was a useful learning experience), four other students noted. Eight of the sixteen iGoogle users remarked explicitly that "set-up was really easy, and putting it all in French is cool." The iGoogle portion of the Googleries exercise thus proved effective. As Kharbach suggests, the francophone information is coming without even being summoned.

- *Google search*: Rather than simply translating articles or resources online, not always in the most accurate way, Google provides more than 100 "extensions" that promote rapid research in the source language. That is, for instance, www.google.es will yield results from hispanophone sources, www.google.vn from Vietnamese, and www.google.fr from francophone ones. The sixteen students engaged in all seven aspects of the Googleries project reported "excitement" and great satisfaction with Google search, some of them experimenting with extensions other than .com and .fr. For instance, a native speaker of Greek found that comparing research results found in http://www.google.gr/ v. google.com or google.fr did indeed show how each language group emphasizes search results deemed to be most "relevant" to the speakers of that language; a native speaker of Japanese found that http://www.google.co.jp/webhp?hl=ja gave her quicker, more on-the-spot access to reports from 2011 disasters in Japan than did google.com or google.fr. Once again, a question might be raised about who decides what is relevant to whom. Overall, the sixteen students agreed that Google's alternative extensions were "something I am going to continue to use" in future. This sort of decision marks a success.

- *Google interaction options*: Besides using Gmail, Coastline students have been encouraged to take advantage of Google instant messaging, Google Talk, Picasa, and the new Google Plus for sharing words and images in real time. Among these, instant messaging (IM) has proven most useful and most used; students have

"found" one another online at the same time they are, shared Websites, asked course-related questions, and even made plans to see one another in person by using the small, lower-screen IM communication boxes. By contrast, Google Talk has proven at once least used and least useful; none of the sixteen students expressed any enthusiasm for more than a minor effort to make Talk work, preferring text messaging or simply telephoning to Talk. Picasa has proven useful as a repository for sharing photos that has the sort of pure, simple interface to be expected of Google. Twelve of the sixteen students who used Picasa stated that they will continue to use it, and eight of these twelve remarked that they prefer Picasa over Flickr and other photo-sharing services. Google Plus, and its attendant Circles seem to be gathering partisans as fast as Facebook users become disillusioned with the cumbersome and nearly overwhelming nature of that utility. Eight of the sixteen Googleries participants noted that they "would prefer never to use Facebook again" in favor of Google plus Circles.

- *Google knowledge sharing*: The Google Blogger, exemplified at http://www.blogger.com/home?pli=1, posed some problems to Coastliners, and the problems were not just linguistic. In fact, all twenty Googleries participants stated that they "expected something easier to use" from Google; some of the difficulties that were cited included adding members to the blog, adding entries to it, and changing its format. Google Reader (www.**google**.fr/**reader**/) and GoogleBooks (http://books.google.fr/) "surprised me", stated one of the sixteen Coastliners, who found that suggested readings "just landed on my page", but that these readings were "always good." Others stated that being subscribed to feeds in Reader and in Knol from other professionals in their own fields or in fields of their interest had led them to do more research, which should be a goal in education. Indeed, the Knol "unit of knowledge" (http://knol.google.com/k) has served as a text repository for at least six Coastliners in a way similar to that of Picasa for images.

- *Google presentation materials*: Google documents (introduction in French at **docs**.**google**.com/?hl=fr), spreadsheets, and presentations permit users to write/record without having to deal with software licensing fees or downloads from Microsoft, inter alia. All twenty Coastline students looked at Google presentation materials (http://www.google.com/google-d-s/intl/fr/tour1.html) that were part of the project, and sixteen students submitted assignments in Google document format. Two students noted their preference for Google spreadsheets "after figuring them out", and two other students stated that they "liked the variety of options" in Google's version of Power Point, "presentations."

In sum, a thirty-two week project has demonstrated that the basic and perhaps easiest-to-use Google tool, Gmail, is also the most likely to be taken advantage of by adult students. Google Chrome proved popular as well, and iGoogle presented some happy surprises to Coastline student participants, who all noted the influence of interface upon one's outlook into cyberspace. Students took enthusiastic advantage of assignment-production tools such as Google docs and Google Knol, too, as well as the Google search engine

with its alternative linguistic/cultural extensions. All twenty students engaged in the Coastline *Googleries* project stated that their technical/computer-use skills had improved during the project period, and twelve of them added that their typing and formatting in French had benefitted especially from the *Googleries* activities.

Immersion in francophone cyberspace expedited vocabulary acquisition and grammatical skills improvement, not just prolixity. All twenty students who participated in the *Googleries* project advanced in reading and understanding of French, as judged in accordance with American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) guidelines (2001). Notably, the language that participants produced was creative, student-produced, and novel, not simply context-reduced mimicry equivalent to a written form of call-and-response. Since it is clearly an individual, internal, variable process, language production should be expected to differ from one learner to another, and the online environment facilitates this while it also provides consistent, regular, correct grammatical formulations that learners can incorporate into their work. Indeed, vocabulary improvement outpaced other linguistic and technical skills improvements as tested with tools from francaisfacile, tv5.org, and French.about.com. Technical skills came second, according to Googleries participant reports, and grammar skills followed.

Without seeming to realize it, the Googleries students also attained worldview knowledge and linguistic pragmatic awareness that they had not demonstrated previously. More than one student remarked, for instance, upon how many "international, outside-the-country news reports just pop up" with francophone iGoogle, by contrast with the American news-filled Anglophone iGoogle variant. Students wrote in their French language journals that they were discovering more through their online French course about more countries and people than they had done in other humanities or social sciences courses previously. And with respect to their linguistic pragmatics skills, their ability to interact with one another in a polite way, to ask questions, to communicate information, even to help one another online, all twenty students improved in this arena. During electronic live chat sessions, students explained to one another in French how to accéder (gain access to) course documents, how to télécharger and téléverser (download and upload), and other activities, using step-by-step instructions and waiting for one another to confirm success. These learned skills would almost certainly not have accrued to students working in either a traditional classroom environment or a less intensive, across-the-board online one.

Implications and Discussion

Not only has it been evident that students of French language and culture online have learned their course material and some technological skills and vocabulary through the use of seven Google tools, but these learners are perhaps evidencing yet another phenomenon heretofore demonstrated only in random samples: The Google Effect, called by Sparrow et al. (2011), "an enormous collective act of transactive memory". That is, just as Sparrow et al. (2011) have noted to be the case among students at Columbia and Harvard Universities, so have learners remarked at Coastline that they frequently forget "small details" that they believe they will be able to re-access easily online. Indeed, as

Coastline students noted, such a belief is warranted in a world of tabbed browsing, where re-accessing requires only a click. Too, just as Sparrow et al. have claimed to have found in their study, so do Coastliners write that they believe they know better where and how to find information than they know details about that information. Researching has become quick; knowledge retention is less likely. In an interesting example of how this new quick-search skill has developed and become manifest, some of the twenty students of French involved in the Coastline *Googleries* project were participating in early 2012 in an electronic online chat unrelated to the project when new vocabulary in a French article from the newspaper *Le Monde* popped up. Within fewer than five seconds, three chat participants had looked up the "new" expressions and posted them in the chat; as Sparrow would say, "We (humans) are remarkably efficient." These students pointed out that the tabbed browsing of Google had expedited their search, since they could be "in" the electronic live chat while also keeping a link open to an online dictionary and a news Website, even on a small-screen iPad or on a laptop computer. Serendipitously, these learners have acquired the sorts of research skills that it might have taken them years to attain without simple, freely available online tools, and they have gained an enriched awareness of francophone language and culture while doing so. They have seen through the use of more than one search language how events, facts, attitudes, and opinions are evaluated, weighted, sent to la Une (the front page, the main headlines) in different linguistic groups. They have seen how argumentation takes place as part of dialogue in French; as Baudry (2003), among others, has noted, it is often the manner of argumentation, the rhetorical devices, the logic that lend credibility to a French stance more than might words or facts alone.

Along with argumentation techniques, the aforementioned linguistic pragmatics of French learned online include turn-taking, as well as rules of politeness, the use of litotes, and recognition of another. Gmail, instant messaging, and Google Plus are different in French, v. English, and all twenty participants in the Coastline *Googleries* project learned this. In addition, broader sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic consequences accrue. For instance, having access to diverse sound systems, to various ways of expressing an idea, to alternative manners of addressing a problem, all can open the mind to the complementary. The neural flexibility that results can expedite one's problem-solving capability and can even offer him options for work or pleasure that he may not have considered within the framework of a single linguistic worldview.

Conclusion

Clearly, more research is warranted and more practice should be offered to determine just how successful the seven *Googleries* used at Coastline might be in expediting the acquisition of a new language and a new worldview. Although the project participant group was too small even for proper statistical analysis, student remarks, along with improved, more "native-like" language use, have indicated that, as Marcus and Gould (2000) have claimed, the electronic interface does have an effect on us. These authors have claimed that "we need to make it feasible to develop multiple versions of Websites" (2000:44). Coastliners have found that the multiple versions provided by Google and customizable to their own desires or needs can facilitate their learning, and it might be

interesting to continue the *Googleries* project so that students of diverse linguistic/cultural backgrounds could co-create interfaces approximating the goal of "UI", or universal interface design. After all, perhaps the most productive result of the *Googleries* project, besides its instilling of awareness, is that an enriched overall view of things will evolve most practicably when the perspective is pluralized.

References

Albro, S. (2011). Open source open world. *Focus*. Retrieved 23 January, 2012
    http://www.focus.com/fyi/open-source-open-world/

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. (2001). ACTFL Proficiency
    Guidelines. Hastings-on-Hudson, New York: ACTFL.

Baudry, P. (2003). *Français et Américains: L'Autre rive.* Paris: Village Mondial.

Bohannon, J. (2011). Searching for the Google effect on people's memory. *Science*. 15
    July. 277.DOI:10.1126/science.333.6040.277 Retrieved 21 January 2012
    http://www.uvm.edu/~cmplxsys/newsevents/pdfs/2011/google-effects-on-
    memory-Commentary.pdf

Hawkes, M. and Dennis, T. (2003). Supporting and assessing online interaction.
    Educational Technology, *43*(3). 52-56.

Eune, J. and Lee, K. (2009). Analysis on intercultural differences through user
    experiences of mobile phone for glocalization. IASDR. Papers.
    http://www.iasdr2009.org/ap/Papers/Orally%20Presented%20Papers/Culture/Ana
    lysis%20on%20Intercultural%20Differences%20through%20User%20Experience
    s%20of%20Mobile%20Phone%20for%20glocalization.pdf

Green, R. (2011). Online courses make language learning easy and fun. *Coggno*. May 11.

Indika (2011). Difference between Baidu and Google. *Difference Between*, July 28.

Kharbach, M. (2011). iGoogle in the classroom. Educational Technology and Mobile
    Learning. http://educationaltech-med.blogspot.com/2011/01/igoogle-in-
    classroom.html

Marcus, A. and Gould, E. (2000). Crosscurrents: Cultural dimensions and global interface
    design. *Interactions*, July-August. pp. 32-46.

Melton, J. (2006). The effect of a native-language interface vs. a target-language interface
    on students' performance. In *User-centered computer aided language learning*
    (pp. 234-246). Hershey: Idea.

Volterra, V. and Teaschner, T., (2008). The acquisition and development of language by bilingual children, *Journal of Child Language*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 311-326.