

## **Pedagogical Boundaries for Web Resources. An Integrative Proposal for the FL Classroom**

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**Abstract.** This article focuses on the pedagogical aspects to be taken into account when introducing web resources into the language teaching and learning process. The article pays special attention to two concepts, learner literacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and learner autonomy development, since both play a key role in the definition of the pedagogical boundaries which should provide a framework for an effective language teaching and learning proposal involving the introduction of web resources in the FL classroom. The conclusions drawn from the article should be read as tentative suggestions which can lead to new working hypotheses in the field of online language teaching and learning in general and, more particularly, the introduction of web resources.

**Keywords.** FL, web resources, language learning autonomy, language teaching and learning process.

### **1. Introduction**

When we talk about the possibility of implementing Web resources in the FL classroom, as teachers, two thoughts usually come to our minds. On the one hand, we know that the Internet is an immensely seductive resource for language learning and that it offers genuine opportunities for self-directed learning. On the other hand, we are aware that the largesse of Internet resources could slow down learners' learning process, since the web's lack of structure is a real potential for learners' disorientation and cognitive overload (Conklin 1987; Sweller 2005). Even despite the fact that our learners are regular web-users, most of them might not have developed the appropriate navigation skills they need to find suitable pedagogical resources for their particular needs and, even if they do find them, they might not know how to exploit them in a pedagogically effective way. For this reason, our aim should be to help our students to make the most of these web resources and, to do so, we should incorporate training activities aimed at the development of multiliteracy (Cope and Kalantzis 2000; Shetzer and Warschauer 2000; Coiro 2003; Hauck and Stickler 2006; Chun 2007; Luzón, see this issue; Villanueva *et al.*, in press) into our programmes and materials. That is to say, our students need to know the new skills derived from the new medium and apply them in their learning process if we want them to be considered literate students in the present century, as Kasper (2000: 106) states:

[...] to be considered multiliterate, students today must acquire a battery of skills that will enable them to take advantage of the diverse modes of communication made possible by new technologies and to participate in global learning communities.

Following Kasper (2000), being multiliterate involves being electronic literate, among other literacies (for a further description of Kasper's definition of multiliteracy see Luzón in this issue), which can be described as the ability to use electronic tools for communication, construction, research and autonomous learning (Shetzer and Warschauer 2000). Following Luzón (see this issue) being electronic literate thus requires:

[...] engaging in new thought processes, in order to interact with new text formats (e.g., hypertext and interactive multiple media), new reader-related issues (e.g., new purposes or motivations for reading a text, high-level metacognitive skills) and new activities (e.g., publishing online, participating in online synchronous and asynchronous exchanges). (Coiro 2003)

In sum, we should use web resources not to teach the same thing in a different way but rather to help our students to enter a new realm of collaborative inquiry and construction of knowledge (Chun 2007), which can only be possible from an autonomising perspective of the language learning and teaching process. Therefore, I agree with Felix (2000) on the fact that a rough introduction to Web resources in the FL classroom would be an unforgivable pedagogical mistake, if we, as teachers, are concerned about the discussion outlined above.

This paper focuses on the description and discussion of the pedagogical framework that allows web resources to be effectively integrated within the FL classroom in order to make learners more autonomous in their learning process and therefore become literate students in the new learning and teaching contexts. The pedagogical reflection underlying such a discussion responds to two basic questions, that is, i) What do our learners need the web resources for? and ii) How should the web resources be integrated into the language learning and teaching process? The answers to both questions will inform the integrative proposals described below.

## 2. What for?

The innumerable capabilities of Web resources for pedagogical purposes make foreign language teachers resort to them to include as part of their course materials and resources. Indeed, the WWW offers many proposals ready to be used in the FL classroom. For instance, teachers can make use of the web resources available at websites that are mainly driven by commercial concerns such as [Peak English: the Online Interactive English School](#). The materials found on this type of website are supposed to be designed by experts in the field of FL pedagogy and therefore theoretically valid for the courses we give as FL teachers. However, more often than not these proposals are not far from traditional paper-based proposals as regards the pedagogical framework they are based on. In other words, these proposals might not take into account the aforementioned pedagogical premises aimed at the development of language learning autonomy that should lead our students to become literate learners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Furthermore and because of the commercial nature of these websites, learners are expected to pay a fixed fee that enables them to access the materials and resources. Teachers can also access different materials and resources available at websites run by publishers such as [Cambridge University Press](#) or [Heinemann](#), which offer teachers and learners some portions of their work as well as links to different web resources that have previously been selected and revised by them. Most of the materials available on some of these websites are samples in pdf format that have been extracted from their hard copy publications. Hence, the pedagogical reasons that might lead teachers to use this type of material should not be different from the pedagogical reasons they argue for integrating the traditional activities based upon communicative purposes. In fact, it might be difficult for teachers to see how the use of such materials can contribute to the development of learners' new literacy skills. One of the most popular resources commonly found on the WWW are those created by FL teachers and FL researchers such as [Daves Sperling's ESL Café](#) or [Isabel Pérez's ESL website](#). These websites include a wide variety of activities and materials that, in most cases, exploit the technical richness afforded by the medium. Thus, teachers can integrate activities such as the webquest (Dodge 1995; March 1998; for a further description

of the webquest see Luzón, this issue), which fits the pedagogical requirements needed to enhance the teaching-learning process in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Finally, I would like to mention those websites which have not been explicitly created for language learning, but offer an almost boundless pedagogical potential for the FL classroom that is only limited by teachers' purposes and learners' needs. Although nearly all the websites available on the WWW can fit such a description, some good examples could be those of newspapers such as [The Times](#) or [The Daily Telegraph](#), among others, or those of institutions that can provide our students with useful information such as, for example, [Greenpeace](#), [The European Council](#), or the websites of universities. The selection and integration of this type of webpage depend on the specific pedagogical goals we, as teachers, have in mind.

Among the diversity in quality and quantity of the materials the WWW has to offer, it is crucial to have a clear goal in mind when integrating Web resources in the language classroom. In order to make the most of web resources in our language classroom, teachers should not only take into account factors such as the age, level or even profession of their different audiences, but also consider contents and goals as the basis for a prior evaluation of the Internet resources in order to improve their pedagogical efficacy, as noted by Felix:

What we see everywhere on the web is an ever-expanding multiplication of sites at all levels- individual exercises, courses of varying ambition, mega-sites that seek to catalogue everything available in any one language or even in all languages together [...] the problem is not to identify the myriad of sites available, but to evaluate and discover not only what each does but also how well it does it. (Felix 1999: 30)

Bearing in mind Felix's words, language teachers should become web-researchers (Ruiz-Madrid and Sanz-Gil 2007) and first explore and later exploit web resources, while bearing in mind what kind of resources our students might need and what they are going to use them for. In the light of what has been said, relevance and pertinence, thus, should be central pedagogical criteria when it comes to evaluating and selecting Web resources to be introduced into a language teaching-learning plan. Taking into account these two criteria might result in a particular classification of web resources according to learners'/users' particular needs, as for example in the case of [Isabel Perez's web](#).

Likewise, as web-researchers teachers should also take into account the possibility of creating more complex classifications responding to other pedagogical aspects involved in the *what for*. Sanz (2003) proposes a classification based upon two different criteria, that is, a) the type of user, and b) the function of the web resources that are selected; this classification can be seen in Table 1:

**Table 1. Sanz's classification of web resources (Sanz 2003: 167).**

TYPE OF USER	FUNCTION
<b>Teacher</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Information</li> <li>➤ Action               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Communication</li> <li>▪ Research</li> <li>▪ Teaching</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Learner</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Information</li> <li>➤ Action               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Communication</li> <li>▪ Learning</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

### 3. How to integrate them?

It is the *how* that has given rise to the multiple theoretical reflections and experimental studies that have focused on the search for *the* language teaching-learning approach that could result in a pedagogically effective introduction of WWW resources into the language classroom; as noted by Chambers (2001: 1) “(...) the success of the project will depend to a great extent on the theoretical or pedagogical approach adopted by the researcher”. For this reason, most of the theoretical reflections and studies presented in the field in recent years (Levy 1997; Alessi and Trollip 2001; Littlemore 2001; Beatty 2003; Chapelle 2003, 2006; Sanz 2003; Blin 2004) have been involved in an urgent search for effective methodological foundations that can inform the design and development of new proposals aimed at integrating technology into the language teaching and learning process. The hypermedia nature of the medium that supports flexibility and individualised learning plans has led to Language Learning Autonomy (henceforth LLA) being put forward as the most suitable approach (Blin 1999; Little 2001; Littlemore 2001; The European Directorate General of Education and Culture 2003; Sanz 2003; Villanueva 2003; Ruiz-Madrid and Sanz-Gil 2007) for effective pedagogical management of ICT (Information and Communication Technology). What is more, it is crucial to take into account the fact that the introduction of ICT and, more specifically, Web resources into the language teaching and learning process leads to a reformulation of the process itself. This is due to the multiplication of the types and forms of interaction, resources and supports and eventually the emergence of new genres inherent to ICT (Villanueva 2006), which involves learners’ having new competences and representations and consequently new forms of mediation and advice. In my view, the resulting multiple dimensionality of the teaching and learning process can only be approached from a learner autonomy perspective, in which a socioconstructivist and psychopragmatic approach can allow each of the previously mentioned aspects to develop in a suitable manner.

Bearing in mind these reflections, the selection of web resources to be used in a particular teaching-learning context that is aimed at the development of learner autonomy should fulfil the following expectations:

- Materials should be varied in format (e.g. images, videos, listening, texts) since technology affords the integration of multimodal resources. The use of web resources should be aimed at the exploitation of the authentic materials available on the Web. Besides, this type of material allows the teacher to cater for learners’ different learning styles. Multimodality, thus, should be considered as one of the aspects to be taken into account when selecting web resources.
- Technology allows teachers to integrate web resources to construct different learning routes according to different learning styles, learning needs and goals. At this point, teachers should carefully explore the resources as well as get to know learners’ characteristics and needs.
- When integrating web resources, teachers should pay attention to their organisation. Web resources should be interrelated to each other to offer multiaccessibility based upon a specific labelling. In this way, learners will be able to obtain a list of resources that respond to their particular needs and interests.

- The integration and organisation of web resources should also respond to specific learning goals. Learners would be able to choose them from a pedagogically-informed index by typing in a specific goal.
- Learners should be able to mediate between their learning process and the selected web resources with regard to the *how long*, the *how often* and the *how fast* involved in the language teaching and learning process. For this reason, the integration and the organisation of web resources should also be taken into account. The organisation and integration of the web resources should offer a number of flexible routes that differ in terms of length and duration.
- The integration of web resources or the classification proposed should enrich learners' learning process in terms of diversity of activities. The way the web resources are classified and integrated should therefore motivate learners to widen the range of activities they select as far as pedagogical goals are concerned.
- Finally, web resources should foster collaborative work. Teachers should make the most of the possibilities for communication afforded by the ICTs. In this regard, the use of forums, emails or chat sessions either as standalone elements or as tools integrated within the virtual environment might facilitate the development of activities based upon collaborative work.

Taking into account all these aspects might lead to an effective integration of web resources into the language teaching and learning process in terms of LLA development. Yet, we should not ignore the fact that most web resources, whether they have been specifically designed for language learning purposes or not, presuppose an autonomous language learner who already knows how to set objectives, how to make plans, how to select material, how to incorporate them into their learning plan and how to assess them (Ruiz-Madrid and Villanueva 2003). Furthermore, web resources that have not been designed for pedagogical purposes do not even consider language learners as the potential audience. It is at this point that taking into consideration the abovementioned aspects might result in an implementation of web resources aimed at the development of LLA.

The current situation in the field leads us to distinguish three different perspectives on the introduction of web resources into the language teaching and learning process, which are considered to promote LLA:

1. A *maximalist perspective*, which considers that the characteristics inherent in the medium might lead to an autonomous learning behaviour. This perspective coincides with a specific conception of learner autonomy, which may be understood in terms of individual learning and responds to teaching paradigms based upon models of instruction. Pedagogical proposals based upon *pure* e-learning could be included within this perspective, since in most cases they do not contemplate specific training based upon learning to learn or new literacy aspects.
2. A *minimalist perspective*, which considers the ICT affordances as a secondary or complementary resource. This perspective highlights the design of the learning activities and learners' experience as the key aspects for the development of learner autonomy. It aims at the construction of a learning culture, in which the main elements should be the learners and their freedom to choose the way they prefer to learn according to their personal characteristics, context and learning needs. However, such a goal diminishes the effect of the structure of the medium on the transformation of the learning-teaching behaviour.

As may be appreciated, these two perspectives could be considered to be completely the opposite of each other. Yet, they do coincide in one aspect, that is, neither of them considers the introduction of ICT into the field of language teaching and learning from an interactive and contextual perspective, which could ultimately lead to a development of learner autonomy skills. Bearing this reflection in mind, I think there might be a third perspective, which I call the *integrative perspective*. This perspective draws on the assumption that ICT has an autonomising potential, since it demands a development of specific skills such as:

- the search for and selection of information
- the management of information
- the adaptation of search strategies
- the hierarchical organisation of information
- the elaboration of a learning plan

The acquisition of these strategies allows learners to monitor the process of navigation, thus avoiding cognitive overload and the possibility of getting lost during the process. However, this strategy acquisition should not be understood as an autonomous process, that is, learners are not considered to develop such strategies autonomously. In fact, the real challenge in the language-learning field lies in how to design pedagogical practices aimed at the integration of ICT from an autonomising perspective. The ultimate aim of such proposals should be to make learners apprehend such practices and therefore be able to learn to integrate ICT resources into their own learning plans according to their own needs and the context in which their learning process takes place, that is, to become literate learners in the terms discussed in section 1.

The integrative perspective involves the reconsideration of the role of many of the aspects and actors involved in the language teaching and learning process, such as the role of the teacher, the role of the learner and the role of materials, for instance. On the one hand, teachers should become facilitators and mediators of the learning process providing students with guidelines to help them interpret and organise the information they are given, so they can fit it into their previous knowledge of the world (Dole *et al.* 1991). On the other hand, students have to learn to become active participants in their learning process. Furthermore, activities could be contextualised within a specific framework that should take into account a situational, discursive and learning framework (Ruiz-Madrid 2005).

The next section is devoted to the presentation and description of an integrative perspective, which was designed for a particular learning context. This proposal was used in the language classroom – in this case, the English language classroom – and was positively evaluated by both learners and researchers (Ruiz-Madrid 2005).

#### **4. TADLA: an integrative proposal**

TADLA (i.e. Technology Applied to the Development of Learner Autonomy) was inspired in a previous proposal designed by the GIAPEL (i.e. *Grupo de Investigaciones y Aplicaciones Pedagógicas en Lenguas*)<sup>1</sup> group, which was called SMAIL (i.e. *Sistema Multimedia de Aprendizaje Interactivo de Lenguas*)<sup>2</sup>. The GIAPEL group at the Universitat Jaume I attempted to bridge the gap that existed between the use of ICT for pedagogical purposes and the theoretical discussion on language learning. Basing its work on *action research* premises,

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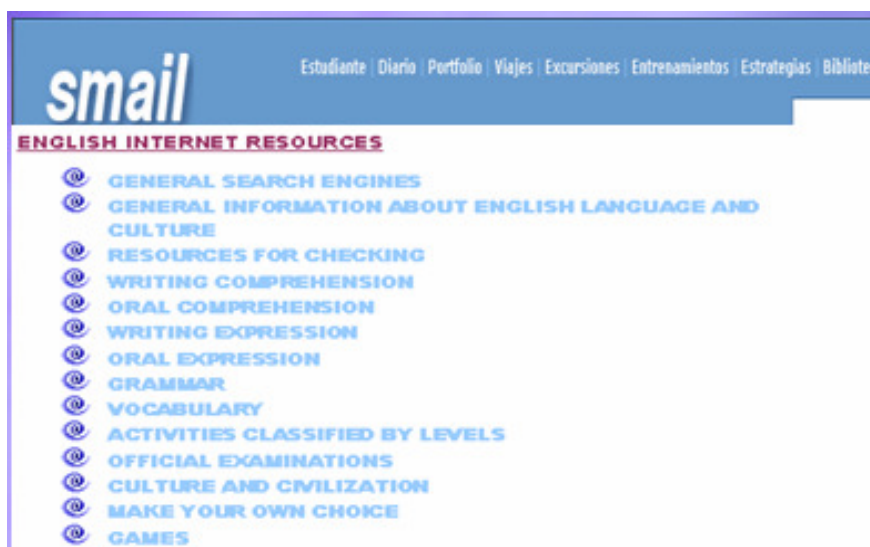
<sup>1</sup> Group of Research and Pedagogical Applications in Languages

<sup>2</sup> Multimedia System of Interactive Language Learning

the SMAIL project was basically concerned with applying previous research on learning profiles and textual/discourse typologies to hypermedia design. One of our challenges was to integrate web resources into the system in such a way that they become defining elements of the personalised learning routes offered by the system. In this regard, SMAIL proposed four different default learning paths with respect to learners' learning styles, namely, (a) default route for a traveller (i.e. learner) with a guide, (b) default route for a traveller with a clear route in mind, (c) default route for a traveller with an opinion of his/her own, and (d) default route for a 'fearless' traveller.

The web resources implemented in each of these learning routes differed according to learners' learning style. Consequently, if a learner took the learning style test implemented in the system, and he/she was considered to be *a traveller with a guide*, the type of web resources would be different to those offered to a *fearless traveller*. Accordingly, the first traveller would find specific web resources clearly associated to the activity proposed in each moment, while the second traveller would find holistic sites, which often offered a compilation of resources. In the first type of learners, individuals are supposed to be more comfortable working with clearly guided resources, while those fitting in the second description prefer to make their own decisions after having explored all the resources available.

Such an integration of web resources responds to a fragmented and partial method, in which they are thoughtfully evaluated and selected bearing in mind all the aspects previously mentioned. However, web resources in SMAIL were also offered in a holistic way. Accordingly, learners were free to choose any of the web resources proposed by the system for their own learning purposes. In order to do this, they could access them from the library section of SMAIL as shown in Figure 1 below:



**Figure 1. Library section of SMAIL.**

In the case of TADLA, the implementation of the web resources responds to the two aforementioned criteria: relevance and pertinence, since all the resources are contextualised taking into account a situational, discursive and learning framework which might favour the development of learner autonomy. Figure 2 shows how web resources from a specific unit are presented to learners:

The screenshot shows the TADLA web interface. At the top, there are navigation buttons: "ATRÁS" (Back), "INICIO" (Home), and "ADELANTE" (Forward). Below these are icons for "Diario de aprendizaje" (Learning diary), "Guardar navegación" (Save navigation), "Leer el texto del módulo" (Read the module text), "Ver solución" (View solution), and "Ayuda metodológica" (Methodological help).

On the left, there is a "Menú de navegación" (Navigation menu) with the following items: Bienvenida, Objetivo 1, Objetivo 2, ¿Qué hacer?, Menú de la ruta, Leer el texto, Escuchar el texto, Hipótesis iniciales, Organización del texto, Estrategias de la argumentación, Más Información (highlighted), and Objetivo 3.

The main content area contains the following text:

Quizás sería una buena idea apuntar, copiar y pegar... algunas cosas en tu diario de aprendizaje  
Si has tenido dificultades con el vocabulario puedes recurrir al [diccionario](#) y buscar las palabras que te interesen

Puedes consultar los enlaces de más información para saber más sobre:

- Conectores
  - [http://esl.about.com/library/writing/blwrite\\_connectors\\_comparison.htm](http://esl.about.com/library/writing/blwrite_connectors_comparison.htm)
  - <http://www.eslplanet.com/teachertools/argueweb/frntpage.htm>
  - <http://www.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/conjunctions.htm>
  - [http://www.ccc.commnet.edu/cgi-shl/quiz.pl/run-ons\\_add1.htm](http://www.ccc.commnet.edu/cgi-shl/quiz.pl/run-ons_add1.htm)
  - <http://lc.byuh.edu/CNN-N/CNN-N.html>
  - <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Criollo-LitReview.html>
- Textos argumentativos
  - <http://www.santarosa.edu/philosophy/essaytutorial.htm>
  - <http://www.studygs.net/wrtstr4.htm>
  - <http://commhum.mccneb.edu/argument/summary.htm>

Además puede seleccionar diferentes materiales que te ofrecemos en nuestro [banco de materiales](#) y preparar tu propia unidad de trabajo.

Figure 2. Web resources integrated in TADLA.

The authentic nature of the documents and web resources included in *TADLA* has helped to preserve the pragmatic and semantic dimension of texts, which might be essential to activate learners' textual representations and therefore to provoke a transfer process from L1 to L2. Furthermore, it caters for the semiotic-communicative value of the image. Additionally, *TADLA* offers the learners the sources of the texts or videos used in the units, since they might help learners to recognise their discursive background thanks to the general framework (i.e. context-based knowledge) wherein they are presented. Figure 3 shows the webpage from the BBC, on which videos about the Iraq war are available. Learners are given the option to visit this page when working on one specific unit focused on a text about the Iraq war. The option of watching a video is also available in any of the units offered by *TADLA*.

The screenshot shows the TADLA web interface for the "A war beneath contempt" unit. The navigation menu on the left is the same as in Figure 2, but "¿Qué hacer?" is highlighted.

The main content area contains the following text:

El texto propuesto para tu nivel es:  
**A war beneath contempt**

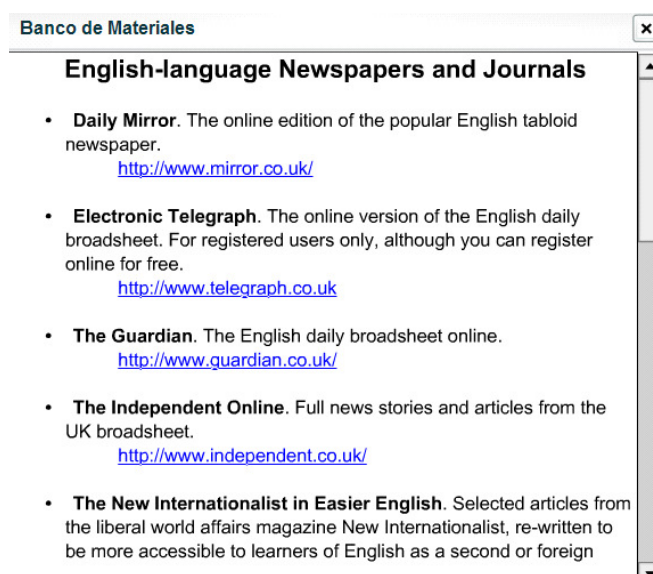
¿Qué quieres hacer con esto?

- [Quiero leerlo y hacer los ejercicios](#)
- [Quiero escucharlo: La entonación puede ayudarme a comprender el tema del que trata el texto](#)
- [Quiero ver una página con videos relacionado con el texto para poder tener una idea del tema que se trata en el texto](#)

Figure 3. "Watching a video" option in "A war beneath contempt" unit from TADLA.

The role of web resources in TADLA is also aimed at promoting the discursive dimension of the teaching-learning process, as shown in Figure 3 above. In fact, at the end of each module learners/users are offered a specific section with different web resources that provide materials and activities allowing them to continue to work on those linguistic and discursive topics already presented in each specific module. This is focused on making learners reflect on what they have done and therefore work on learning-to-learn strategies and self-evaluation premises.

TADLA also offers a ‘materials bank’ section, which consists of a list of web resources that can provide learners with authentic materials that they can use as the central elements when designing their own learning plans. Figure 4 shows the materials bank section linked to the second module offered by TADLA (i.e. *I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints*):



**Figure 4. Bank of materials in module 2 in TADLA.**

In TADLA, learners can also find a list of monolingual, bilingual, multilingual and specialised online dictionaries, which have been previously selected and examined by the researcher. Each of the dictionaries included is followed by a brief description of the type of dictionary it is, as well as the content it offers. The decision to include a brief descriptive gloss derives from the conclusions obtained in a previous study (Ruiz-Madrid 2005), in which learners showed a major preference for the inclusion of this type of information in the links provided by the teacher. They claimed that the guiding comments save time and make learners feel more confident during the learning process. Additionally, the *TADLA* list of free-access on-line dictionaries offers learners/users the possibility to consult any language as well as to look up any type of information, that is, they can find anything from a simple translation to an option in a thesaurus.

## 5. Conclusion

The ICTs in general and more specifically Web resources might have an autonomising potential if employed in a specific learning context in which:

- The information offer acquires relevance.
- The skills related to ICT management are integrated within language-learning activities.
- The learning tasks allow ICT to be integrated into learners' own learning plans.

Looking at web resources from an integrative perspective might lead to the design of autonomising language teaching-learning proposals aimed at taking full advantage of the medium. Such proposals might prompt learners to use the new strategies derived from the medium and later develop a learning behaviour, which would ultimately lead them to become literate learners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. TADLA attempts to represent an integrative method for the introduction of web resources into the language teaching and learning process. However, there is still a great deal left to be discussed on the role of web resources in the language teaching and learning process and the role of teachers and researchers becomes crucial at this point. The pedagogical boundaries concerning web resources have still to be defined and proven methods for successful integration need to be described.

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