

Iya-ola

Iya-ola is a collection of language learning games with a difference: the player can only progress through collaborating with a learner in a different country. Iya-ola provides carefully structured language exercises using web-based audio-visual chat technology. Initially focusing on English and Spanish, it has the potential to be developed for use with other languages.



Team

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Technology (platforms & systems)

Broadband web technology powered
by Macromedia
Games server
Apple iChat

Outline

Like an online exchange, the project provides 9 year-old children with a means of trying out their Spanish with Spanish-speaking children, whilst the Spanish children have an opportunity to practice their English.

Initially, in the home country, conversations are introduced to learners through playful computer-based adventures. In response to the learner's actions, carefully structured language is provided by the system. The learner uses this information to answer questions correctly in order to move forward. As the game progresses the language varies, and learners encounter new topics involving numbers, family members and so on.

After rehearsing this language in the game format, the learner then joins an audio-visual chat with another learner (or group of learners) in a Spanish-speaking classroom. These children have also been playing a game, identical in all ways except that it's in English. Both sides then have to help each other solve a puzzle that demands the use of the language practised at that level. Learners can converse with their Spanish or English teammates by using a number of levels of communication: at the pilot stage this will concentrate on instant IP messaging and video-conferencing.

If the game does its job, eventually the language will flow between learners in the two countries without the need for a specific quiz structure to help learners. The two schools will have formed a link for their joint language and culture teaching.

Learning and Research Objectives

Through the development of the Iya-ola prototype, Futurelab and the project partners are looking to answer the following questions:

- 1 What language vocabulary, constructs and games structures are appropriate for learners at this age?
- 2 Does Iya-ola offer learners effective practice in their language skills and is it sufficiently challenging?
- 3 How do we prepare learners for collaboration?
- 4 Does the system actually support collaboration?
- 5 Is collaboration best viewed as a peer-to-peer or a class-to-class or a group-to-group interaction?
- 6 What other resources and preparation are required before the use of Iya-ola?

- 7 What kind of classroom settings and arrangements are appropriate for using the game?
- 8 What features can sustain collaboration beyond the game?

Research and Development Process

Initial research has included spending time with learners of the target age, discovering their likes and dislikes about being abroad with their parents. Year 5 pupils at Westbury Park School were involved in this stage of the project development and this gave some clues as to what kind of scenarios they would find interesting and the kinds of characters that they would identify with. Teachers with experience of linking classrooms and those with experience of video-conferencing have also been consulted, to provide guidance on getting the system right for a classroom setting.



Screen-shot of Iya-ola

As the game develops, the idea will be tested with teachers and students in both the UK and Spain. The communication technology will also be tested in classroom settings. Eventually the aim is to make the chat system fully integrated, however the pilot phase will use off-the-shelf technology (Apple iChat).

Supported by:



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