



SPEAKAPPS

Production and interaction in a foreign language through online ICT tools

Progress Report

Public Part

Project information

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Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the progress made up till its mid-term point by the SpeakApps project, funded under the Lifelong Learning programme of the Education, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency of the European Commission.

Speaking is one of the hardest skills to put into practice when learning a foreign language. Very often formal second or foreign language acquisition settings provide insufficient opportunities for everyone in the classroom to practise the language. If the learning is done through an online course, speaking is mostly put aside in favour of writing, reading and listening. SpeakApps aims to fill this gap by providing ICT-based services and pedagogies to practise oral competencies online: speaking production and interaction in the CEFR, thus offering a way for all foreign language learners and teachers to practise and evaluate speaking skills at a distance or outside the physical classroom. The activities and tools provided in SpeakApps are designed to be used both within face-to-face and blended courses and as the main speaking activities for online courses.

SpeakApps is mainly aimed at foreign language teachers who want to offer their students further opportunities for speaking production and interaction. These teachers will find in SpeakApps a resource from which to learn, teach and contribute. Organised as an open source software community and cloud service, all materials, activities and tools will be available for download, online use and further development. In this way, the project is also aimed at developers who wish to contribute further to the development of the tools. While not being the main target audience of the project or this report, language learners remain the main end-users of the tools developed within the project and their needs are the prime reference for the design of materials and contents. The project aims to reach a large number of learners by targeting their teachers providing them with materials, ICT tools, training and a community of practice.

The configuration of the Consortium ensures the necessary expertise and contacts are available to fulfil the project objectives. The five Consortium partners, the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (Spain) the University of Groningen (The Netherlands), Jyväskylä University (Finland), Jagiellonian University (Poland) and Dublin City University (Ireland) gather together vast expertise in the use of ICT for language learning and teaching, teacher training and development of learning technologies. In addition, between all the partners, the project covers different educational contexts (distance, blended and face-to-face) and languages (Catalan, English, Dutch, Swedish, Polish and Irish) which include more widely and lesser taught languages, in both second and foreign language contexts.

SpeakApps employs a user-centred design approach for activities and tools, and goes through iterative cycles of development and testing, piloting both tools and their pedagogical use in parallel. The SpeakApps platform is now available offering a website (www.speakapps.eu) with an open area with general information of the project, public documentation, videos and other dissemination contents. From the website registered users (anyone can register by creating a free account) can access Moodle classrooms where the three tools developed in the project are available. These tools are **Langblog**, an audio/videoblog for oral production, **Videochat**, a videoconferencing system designed for the specific needs of small group work for language learning, and the **Tandem** tool, a content management system for synchronous pair tasks. Before the start of the 2012 spring semester the website will also include a social network area for teachers where materials can be shared, with a repository for tasks, materials, user guides for activities and tools, and documentation for the inclusion of new languages.

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1. Project Objectives

The SpeakApps project focuses on creating a free and open source online platform and service that gathers ICT-based applications and pedagogies to practice oral skills online.

The concrete project objectives of SpeakApps are:

- 1) To set up a platform and service for the practice and improvement of speaking skills in foreign languages.
- 2) To develop learning activities and tools to be offered through the platform.
- 3) To work towards a self-sustainable community where interested parties collaborate in the extension of tools, materials and services.

The SpeakApps platform will thus serve a community composed of foreign language teachers and their students with:

1. Easy access to innovative and interactive online tools for learning and teaching languages, like Langblog, Videochat and Tandem.
2. Virtual classrooms to carry out pedagogical activities.
3. Exercises and tools for managing materials for synchronous tasks.
4. Technical and pedagogical guides to assist SpeakApps users.
5. A social network offering a common space to exchange ideas and methodologies.

In addition, teacher training is being offered as an important element to ensure that the objectives above are met in an optimal manner.

The SpeakApps project was inspired by a common set of challenges that the language learning community faces on an everyday basis, including:

- Formal second or foreign language acquisition settings do not provide enough room for everyone to practise the language.
- The ephemeral nature of speaking which makes it difficult for students to obtain feedback on their performance, preventing them from properly revising and improving their oral skills.

SpeakApps aims to fill these gaps by designing a popular language learning site supported and built by a large community that enjoys and takes advantage of the possibilities offered by e-learning. The further integration of the tools and activities developed in SpeakApps into virtual classrooms and /or the use of these tools and activities in the SpeakApps platform itself increases the time learners can spend practising oral skills outside traditional contact teaching hours and facilitates the provision of feedback on their recorded performance.

2. Project Approach

The starting point of SpeakApps is the need language learners have to overcome the challenge speaking skills pose to them, as well as the need to assist teachers in finding the optimal way to help their students overcome this challenge. The SpeakApps answer to these needs is increasing opportunities for L2 oral practice online using ICT tools. It is only natural then that the learners and their specific needs within a given context together with their teachers' perception of how to address these needs constitute the basis of this project's cycles of development of the pedagogical activities and the ICT tools which will enable students to carry out these tasks.

The project starts out with a comparative study of current practices of learning and teaching online in terms of foreign/second languages. For this study the partner institutions in SpeakApps share their experience in teaching speaking skills covering a wide range of educational settings (face-to-face/ blended /distance, second/foreign language learning), proficiency levels (A, B and C in the CEFR) and six different languages: Catalan, Irish, Polish, Swedish, Dutch and English. Following this, a review of existing tools is made, as well as a list of resources and services available for language teachers. The main aim of this report is to inform the design of tasks and tool development for the project, and to make it widely available to language teachers who want to learn more about what is already available. The document is available on our website under the Dissemination section.

The next step taken is a survey designed to collect information from students of the six project target languages, addressed not only at students in the partner institutions but also others in university or adult education. This survey gathers information that helps define the specific elements, functionalities and characteristics that need to be present in SpeakApps, both from a pedagogical and technical point of view. Commonalities and differences amongst the project target languages needs are identified, and point to areas of collaboration, specifically during the teacher training and task design phases. The report resulting from this project phase will be available from our website at the end of January 2012.

From this background work, a user-centred design of activities and tools emerges in parallel, while feeding each other with the outcomes of pilots which increase gradually in size and scope. Through iterative cycles of development we approach the study of new innovative uses of ICT tools which make possible a) an increase of hours of student engagement with well-established good teaching practice, as well as b) the development of new creative ways of improving speaking skills.

From a technological development point of view, SpeakApps is based on iterative cycles and a user-centred design, a design philosophy and a product development approach that places the end user of an application at the centre of each design phase in order to ensure that the end product will respond to the users' needs, wants and limitations. Pilot studies are carried out early on and are key to successive iterations of development.

This project approach means that partners contribute to all work packages and that almost all work packages overlap in time, the results of each iteration being used as new requirements for other work packages in the next iteration. To fit better into such a model, after the first project meeting of Consortium partners, the decision was made to slightly modify the work plan, bringing the start date of pilots closer to the beginning of the project and delaying to some extent the development of templates and guidelines for task design in order to allow these to grow from the pilot experiences.

We have now completed the main developments of platform and tools, and two cycles of pilots carried out at the partner institutions and the next step is opening the platform and tools to teachers and their students in other educational institutions/sectors. This will allow us to validate the products (pedagogical and technological) so far developed and identify new

areas of development, as well as gradually build up a community around the platform by incorporating those teachers who participate in the pilots and fostering through training and dissemination actions the collaboration and exchange of ideas, ultimately working towards the creation of a living and self-sustainable community. In parallel with the pilots in the SpeakApps platform, partners have undertaken dissemination activities giving talks on the project at teacher association conferences, CALL conferences and approaching teachers in other institutions. Through our website teachers have also been in touch with us and expressed their interest in joining the project. These teachers are key to the next rounds of pilots planned for the 2012 Spring semester and will contribute to continued sustainability of the project. Collaboration agreements for future project phases have been made at the time we reach the midterm of the project with 15 institutions. This entails reaching a wide audience of teachers and students who can in turn reach out to further sectors of the target population ensuring thus a growing community of users and contributors to keep alive the SpeakApps community beyond the end of the project duration.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

The project work for SpeakApps is organized into 6 workpackages led by different partners in the Consortium. Following the project outcomes and results achieved during the first half of the project are described arranged by workpackage, excluding WP1 Management, an outcome of which is the present progress report:

Workpackage 2 has two main objectives: 1) to elaborate a comparative study of the current practices of learning and teaching online in terms of foreign languages, with a special focus on oral skills, and 2) to gather user requirements of university students and adult learners with regards to the online learning of a foreign or second language.

The production of a **state-of-the-art review of current practices** is a key expected outcome of this workpackage. The analysis of available tools and pedagogies directed towards the development of productive skills (spoken) not only informs the design of a beta version of tools and of preliminary tasks, but it also contributes to the sustainability of the platform, tools, and pedagogical approaches that will have been tried and improved during the project. To date, a preliminary analysis of current practices with regards to the development of spoken productive skills in an online environment has established the broad range of tools and approaches used by language professionals within and outside of the partner institutions, which are rooted in a wide range of theoretical approaches to second language acquisition, and to the teaching and learning of languages in old and emerging digital environments. Given the rapid technological and pedagogical developments in this area, and consequently, given the possible impact of such developments on the sustainability of the project (see WP5), planned activities until the end of the project include:

- 1) The completion of a report providing teachers and their institutions with a review of language learning models, tools, and pedagogies that are particularly suited to the development of productive skills (spoken) among language learners in formal language learning educational settings, whether fully or partially online (e.g. open and distance education, blended learning, etc.). The report is expected to be released to the general public by the end of January 2012 through our website.
- 2) The production, and the dissemination via the SpeakApps website, of video, audio, and graphical artefacts that illustrate current practices in the partners' states. These multimedia artefacts will be available to the general public before the end of January 2012.
- 3) On-going monitoring of state-of-the-art review and, where necessary, updating of the initial report via the SpeakApps project wiki until the end of the project (i.e. December 2012).
- 4) Inclusion of findings in sustainability plan and building/stewarding of SpeakApps community.

In order to guide task and tool designers, another key expected outcome is a description of **user requirements and profiles** of the target users of SpeakApps: the language learners. We gather these through surveys and interviews with teachers who are our most immediate target in terms of gathering information and disseminating the project in order to make our tasks and tools reach a large student population. The planned activities in relation to this objective include:

1) Design of survey which was sent out to students of the 6 target languages (Catalan, English, Dutch, Swedish, Polish and Irish) of the project in different adult educational sectors during the fall semester 2011.

2) Analysis of the surveys, first for each language and then all together. Results will be included in the report.

3) Interviews with teachers of the project target languages. These interviews will have taken place in different formats (formal/informal, structured/semi-structured, individual/focus groups) depending on the particularities of each target language teaching context.

4) Drawing scenarios of student profiles based on the results described above.

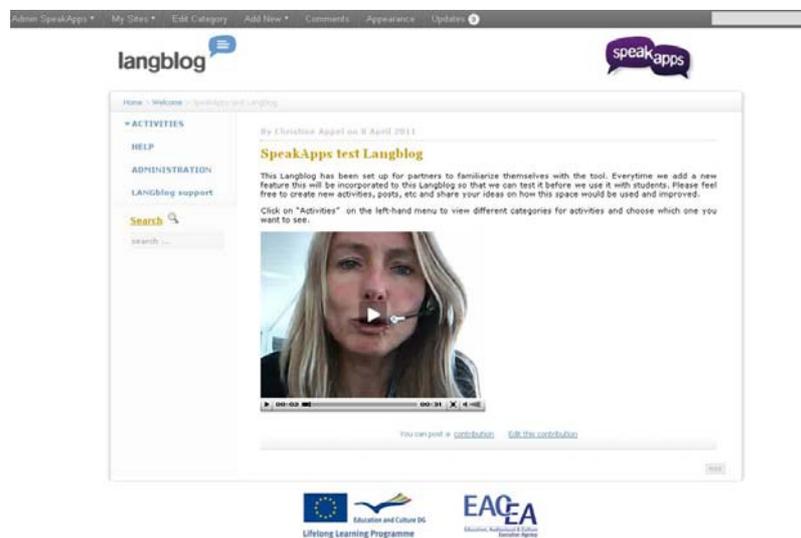
The final outcome is a public report containing the results of the activities described which will be available in the SpeakApps website by the end of January 2012.

Workpackage 3 Pedagogical content, Services and Platform

There are three main areas this workpackage is concerned with: the pedagogical activities, the tools (Langblog, Videochat and Tandem), and the platform and an online community that ensures both pedagogical and technological contents are tried out and validated for a variety of educational contexts.

The following is a description of the main activities/achievements carried out for each area:

1) **Langblog** is an audio/videoblog used for the teaching of oral production skills. It uses blogging technologies to create a Voice forum which facilitates access to audio and video files, easy recording and upload of audio and video files, and interaction amongst group members. Adapted from WordPress, audio and video posts are directly created online by means of Flash, with no program installation required.



We are currently using the second version of Langblog. In the spring semester 2011, this tool was piloted extensively by 4,000 students in the UOC virtual classrooms, and on a small scale by the Dutch (3 groups) and Irish partners (1 group); following the feedback provided, a new version has been developed. Its main new features are: a) a more user-friendly mechanism for recording and uploading files b) more server capacity for streaming video c) a new interface design with a more modern look. This new version has been piloted in the fall semester 2011 with a direct link, as well as within the SpeakApps Moodle classrooms.

The tool interface is available in all 6 languages. The Irish version is only partially available because an Irish version of WordPress does not exist. The student interface is available in Irish since this part of the code has been developed for the specific purpose of Langblog. However, the administration interface for teachers, using existing WordPress functionalities, is currently only available in English. We are currently approaching possible volunteers to contribute to the WordPress community to add Irish as one of the available languages.

Langblog is available in the SpeakApps Moodle platform (see below for login details).

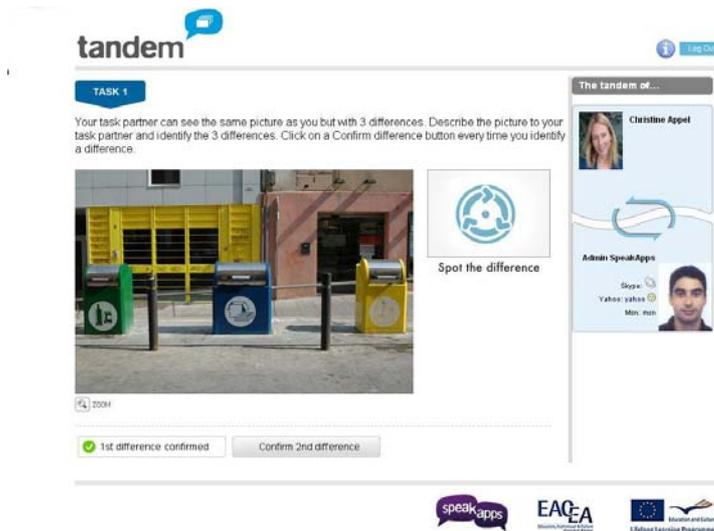
2) **Videochat.** This tool allows for videoconference sessions with up to 6 people, using audio or video. The main idea is to make it easy for students to set up a session without the intervention of the teacher and to record and archive the recording without the need for installing additional software. There are two interfaces: the recorder and the player. The recorder distinguishes itself from already existent videoconferencing systems by its ease of use, recording and archiving, its main features. The player's most distinctive functionality is the solo/mute buttons which allow teachers to listen to the group or to a specific learner in isolation. There is no moderator or administrator roles, all participants have the same profile since the tool is designed specifically for language students carrying out synchronous tasks in pairs or small groups.

The screenshot displays the Videochat interface. At the top left, the logo 'videochat' is visible. Below it, the date '29/09/2011' and time '16:18:55 - 16:24:43' are shown. The topic is 'Proves UOC' and the description is 'Proves amb cinc usuaris'. A timer shows '00:32'. There are audio control icons for mute and volume. The 'PARTICIPANTS' section shows six video thumbnails with names: Juan Antonio, David, Ana, Admin SpeakApps, christian, and a placeholder. Each thumbnail has 'SOLO' and 'MUTE' buttons. The 'CHAT' window on the right shows a list of messages with timestamps and names, including '16:18:55 - David Trelles', '16:19:24 - Juan Antonio Recio Valls', '16:19:36 - christian moya', '16:19:52 - David Trelles', '16:20:08 - Juan Antonio Recio Valls', and '16:20:13 - David Trelles'.

The Videochat tool is now available in its second version as well. The first version was piloted by partner staff members and student volunteers during the spring of 2011, focusing on usability. As a result of the feedback we have developed a second version with the following main new features: 1) A new more user-friendly graphical interface 2) full integration into a virtual environment and automatic archiving of recordings in this environment 3) solo/mute buttons in the player that allow the user to listen to all participants or only one/ or a selection of them.

Videochat is now available as an optional tool in the SpeakApps Moodle classrooms. /see below for login details)

3) **Tandem** tool. Tandem is a content management system for synchronous oral tasks for language learning. This tool administers complementary contents to students working on a task together in an online synchronous medium. The tool retrieves the user information from the environment (e.g. Moodle classroom, Mahara group) and connects a pair of students to carry out a language learning task. It assigns each student a role (i.e. student A, student B) and hands out to each student different contents belonging to same task in order to prompt authentic goal-oriented communication characteristic of fill-in-the-gap tasks. The tool is independent of the communication tool used (skype, adobe connect, the speakapps videoconferencing tool, written chat, etc). An integration of the Videochat and Tandem tool are possible is demand arises from the pilot experience.



The Tandem tool was first piloted in the spring 2011 by members of staff and teachers and has gone through several cycles of development. In October 2011 it was integrated into the SpeakApps Moodle classrooms. We have gathered the results and feedback of 100 students who have tried it out and are planning further developments.

The first trial version of tandem is available in the following link:

<http://fiji.uoc.es/Tandem/>

4) In the fall semester of 2011 a **SpeakApps Moodle** area was made available for users by registering from the SpeakApps website. There are currently 12 active classrooms run by teachers in the project partner institutions. An overview of the currently active classrooms can be seen from the following link:

<http://moodle.speakapps.org/>

Registration to this site is free and the three tools described above are available to view and use in the Demo course in the SpeakApps Moodle platform. Teachers who are interested in piloting the SpeakApps tools should write to speakapps@uoc.edu describing their teaching context, target language and level.

5) A set of activities for each language has been produced. These activities have not yet been made public since we are delaying the creation of support materials for teachers until these materials have been piloted. An additional difficulty found at the time of developing a set of tasks to be shared online is that teachers participating in the pilots have expressed a

preference for designing their own tasks in order to link them closely to the contents of their own courses, or have expressed a wish to adapt tasks they have previously used in a face-to-face setting to the SpeakApps environment using the materials for the course which are subject to a commercial license. In the first case, these tasks will be shared in the SpeakApps platform once piloted, and for the latter case, we plan to set up general task scenarios to be shared and create a number of tasks that can be generic enough to be adapted to different specific contexts. The SpeakApps partners have also agreed to reach a consensus on a broad definition of task that will guide their design. Guidelines for task design will emerge from the first two rounds of pilots and experience during the project and will be made available through our website and platform by the end.

Workpackage 4 Pilot programme

During the reporting period, preparations were made to work towards timely delivery of the intended outcomes of WP4.

Preparation of the pilots

A pre-pilot phase before the summer was added to the original plan during which the project partners tried out the Langblog tool, an early version of which was available before the start of the project. The aim of the pre-piloting phase was to establish familiarity with the technology tools at an early stage in the project. In addition to being tested by teachers, the Langblog tool was also used with students by two of the project partners. The UOC continued the use of Langblog as part of the regular teaching programme and carried out extensive formative evaluation of the tool. The participating teachers have written brief evaluation reports of their findings during the pre-piloting phase. These reports provided feedback and prompted the changes which resulted in a second version of Langblog. The reports and changes made from one version to the other have been documented in the project wiki which will be made public by the end of the project.

During the pre-pilot phase the Tandem and Videochat tools were tried out by teachers and members of staff mainly for usability testing purposes, and task-design training sessions.

Execution of the pilots

From July 2011 onwards the partners have designed more extensive piloting schemes with the 3 tools delivered as outputs of WP3. Since the Videochat tool and Tandem tool were not fully ready for use by the end September, the piloting (mostly as part of the regular teaching programme) started in October 2011 and will continue into the spring term of 2012.

Approximately 21 pilots (trials with groups of students and teachers) have been planned and are being carried out at this moment of reporting. A pilot description template has been developed for ease of reference and pilot experiences are documented on a weekly basis in the project wiki. In view of the integration with the regular teaching programme, most tasks used with the tools are based on tasks derived from existing course work. Selections of the tasks to be delivered as outputs of WP3 will be trialled in teaching in the course of 2012. Pilot execution is in accordance with the original work plan.

Teacher training

The UOC has provided teachers participating in the project with training, guidance and support in using the SpeakApps tools. At this moment other teachers in the participating institutions and from other institutions are informed about the tools and instructed in how to use them (mostly by the core teachers in the project). The materials used in these training sessions will be the basis for the development of specific teacher training materials. In addition, one partner (UJ) is developing specific materials for teacher training which are used in a pedagogical design course with teachers of Swedish. This course will be the basis for the online teacher training course being offered in February 2012.

Evaluation and recommendations

The tools are developed through a cyclical design process. The findings with the LangBlog from the pre-piloting phase have been used as input for making adjustments to the tool and the way in which it can be made available to students. Issues are documented in the tools page of the wiki and solutions are also published there. Student experiences with the tools will be solicited through a survey which is currently under development, focus groups and user walk-throughs with the tools. These evaluation instruments are partly modelled on evaluations that the UOC carried out with 4,000 students and 178 participating teachers earlier this year (the report of these evaluations will be made available shortly in our webpage and as part of the EuroCALL 2011 proceedings). For ease of delivery and processing the surveys will be administered through SurveyMonkey.

Workpackage 5 Sustainability Models

The main objectives of this workpackage are twofold. Firstly, WP5 aims to develop an exploitation plan that will include a detailed business model for the continuing development and maintenance of the SpeakApps platform. Secondly, it aims to establish agreements and collaborations with teachers and institutions within the partners' home countries and beyond.

The nature and numbers of these agreements and collaborations are themselves contingent on the sustained use of the SpeakApps tools, and therefore on their continuing relevance and ease of access to the language teaching community, and more importantly, on the sustained development and critical evaluation of pedagogies for the development and assessment of productive skills (with a specific focus on spoken skills), that may be partially or fully mediated by technologies. It is anticipated that the learning models and accompanying tasks will outlive the technologies, thus requiring that distinct communities (e.g. software developers/educational technologists vs. language professionals), possibly driven by different orientations, be supported and nurtured. Furthermore, to ensure the longer term sustainability of models, pedagogies, and tools that originate from SpeakApps, bridges between related communities (e.g. CEF-Cult) need to be built and all workpackages must thrive to create conditions for sustainable development after completion of the project. To that effect, planned activities until the end of the project include:

- 1) The completion of a draft business plan, based on the initial consortium agreement and guaranteeing free and unlimited access to the platform and tools to all SpeakApps partner institutions for at least one year following completion of the project (to be released before 31 December 2011 through the SpeakApps website).
- 2) The selection, design and deployment of technologies to support the chosen community orientations
- 3) The development of an outreach plan to attract and support language teachers interested in developing spoken skills in digital environments
- 4) The continuing development of tasks and their critical evaluation with a view to ensure sustainability.

Workpackage 6 Dissemination and Community Building

The main objective of WP6 is to reach successfully the target users including foreign languages teachers, institutions, students, and learning tools software developers. The main two results linked to the project objectives are:

SpeakApps Website

The SpeakApps website (<http://www.speakapps.eu>) is a key dissemination element. Besides promoting and explaining the project's goals and services, the website is the entry point to the platform and all the public project outputs. As a demonstrator of SpeakApps, the website was put in place at the beginning of the project and will grow and evolve with it.

Dissemination Strategy Plan

The dissemination strategy plan was put together in the initial stages of the project and has guided the pace and content for actions taken under the umbrella of this workpackage. The products of these actions are all published in our website. Following are two examples that illustrate the type of dissemination actions we have carried out:

- SpeakApps bookmarks, visiting cards and leaflets have been distributed amongst partners to be given out at conferences, seminars and meetings with teachers. These are also available on the SpeakApps website.
- A Youtube SpeakApps channel including: an introductory video about the project (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFAfJojlO0k&feature=related>), and the series TeacherVoices which will be completed by the end of January (there are currently two videos for viewing, one for English and one for Catalan).
- A SlideShare account for SpeakApps: <http://www.slideshare.net/speakapps>

SpeakApps presentations

The Consortium partners have presented the project at conferences, seminars and workshops with the purpose of reaching the target audience of the project, with an emphasis on language teachers. There has been 22 presentations made so far, a complete list of all the presentations with links to their related documents can be found in the SpeakApps website. We describe a few illustrative examples of events where Consortium partners have presented SpeakApps:

APAC February 2011, Teachers of English in Catalonia Association, Annual Conference. (UOC)

Presentation on social media and SpeakApps at the University of Antwerp in March 2011 Linguapolis (Language Centre). (RUG)

CALICO 2011 (Victoria, Canada) (RUG)

Eurocall 2011 conference, the following presentations were made:

- Poster presentation: "SpeakApps: Oral production and interaction in a foreign language through online ICT tools". Author: Christine Appel. (UOC)

- Poster presentation: "Langblog: an exploration of affordances for online oral production and interaction". Authors: *Françoise Blin, Mairéad Nic Giollamhichil, Colm Ó Ciardubháin*. (DCU)

- Paper presentation: Task design for L2 oral practice in audioblog. Authors: Christine Appel, Federico Borges (UOC)

Language Center Days 2011 in Tampere, Finland. (JYU)

Seminar held at the JU Centre for Distance Education in October 2011. Presentation of the project objectives to a group of academics from several Krakow universities. (UJ)

4. Partnerships

The configuration of the Consortium ensures the necessary expertise and contacts are available to fulfil the project objectives. The five Consortium partners, the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (Spain) the University of Groningen (The Netherlands), Jyväskylä University (Finland), Jagiellonian University (Poland) and Dublin City University (Ireland) gather together vast expertise in the use of ICT for language learning and teaching, teacher training and development of learning technologies.

The five Consortium universities cover 5 different countries and their networks and contacts put together will ensure the continuation and sustainability for the project. National, regional and local approaches are key for the promotion of foreign/second language learning. Nevertheless, a European approach provides also added values such as the promotion of language awareness, opportunities for networking for foreign language teachers, and increased contact for language learners with their target language and speakers/learners of this language. SpeakApps contributes to the promotion of foreign/second languages by providing language teaching institutions in Europe with a new means to enhance the diversity of the language learning activities they offer to citizens. Multilingual, multicultural and multicountry initiatives are best approached with a European perspective since it can ensure the balance among the difference languages and cultures, the neutrality of the funding, and the promotion of a unique aim pursued by all partners. The end goal of this approach is that national, regional and local institutions will use the outputs of the SpeakApps to enhance their foreign languages activities.

The Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC) coordinates the project. It currently has around 9,000 foreign language learners every semester. Being a completely online institution, the University has been working on designing and developing tools for online language learning and have extensive experience in their use. The UOC leads workpackages 3 (Pedagogical content, services and platform) and workpackage 6 (Dissemination) and contributes to the specification, design, validation and piloting of the language learning materials and the tools used in support of them for Catalan and English. In the case of English the validation of linguistic and cultural content is carried out by the Irish partner.

The University of Groningen (RUG) contributes to the definition of users' requirements, profile and scenarios for Dutch and the specification, design, validation and piloting of the language learning materials and the tools used in support of them for Dutch. RUG also coordinates workpackage 4, Pilot Studies.

The Jyväskylä University (JYU) co-leads WP5 with the Irish Consortium partner, and contributes to the definition of users' requirements, profile and scenarios for Swedish and the specification, design, validation and piloting of the language learning materials and the tools used in support of them for Swedish. JYU is also heavily involved in the teacher training programme and community building design.

Jagiellonian University is responsible for the definition of users' requirements, profile and scenarios for Polish and Its tasks involve participating in the design of all materials, translating all materials, applications and documents into Polish, validating the activities and materials with respect to the Polish culture and broader context, and piloting the applications and participating in the dissemination of results.

Dublin City University (DCU) co-leads WP2 with UOC and WP5 with JYU. DCU is also responsible for all contributions to all WPs in relation to Irish as well as cultural and language content validation for English. DCU is making a large contribution to the business plan to ensure sustainability of the project, and is playing an important role in the definition of tasks, a key concept around which most of the project developments revolve.

For more information on the individuals and institutions involved in the project, please check <http://www.speakapps.org/partners/>

With the participation of partners in five different countries, the project covers different educational contexts (distance, blended and face-to-face) and languages (Catalan, English, Dutch, Swedish, Polish and Irish) which include widely and lesser taught languages, in both second and foreign language contexts. At the project meetings a fruitful exchange of experiences in the different setting takes place, overview of different settings:

The Consortium partners have known each other long and collaborated extensively mainly through their active participation in EuroCALL, (European Association of Computer-assisted Language Learning). Two of the principal investigators, Françoise Blin (DCU) and Peppi Taalas (JYU) are currently its president and vice-president respectively. The Consortium held a meeting at the venue of Eurocall 2011 (Nottingham) taking advantage of the fact that four Consortium partners were represented there by seven staff members. There were three SpeakApps presentations at the conference. Being aware of each other's expertise, environment and interests is a plus that adds quality to the Consortium.

The global participation of partners through the whole project is key in order to a) validate that all outputs are culturally appropriate, b) bring everyone's expertise and feedback, c) ensure a deep knowledge of the project for further appropriation of its results and for dissemination purposes, d) provide more opportunities for exploitation and sustainability, e) have a balanced distribution of tasks among all partners. The fact that all partners contribute to all workpackages and have to work closely together is already giving its fruit. An example is the online teacher training course being offered in January 2012 in the SpeakApps Moodle platform which will be jointly run by UOC, JYU and RUG. A joint presentation with the title of "The SpeakApps Teacher training programme: a meta-design model for using open educational resources" has been accepted for the EUROCALL Computer-Mediated Communication and Teacher Education Special Interest Groups (SIGs) joint event being held in March 2012 at the University of Bologna, Italy, on the themes of openness and sharing in language teaching and learning.

5. Plans for the Future

At this midterm point of the project we are entering the second phase of pilots which opens the platform and its contents to educational institutions other than the partner universities. This is key to make the tools and tasks widely available, and by doing so entering a process of quality control and validation for a wide ranges of educational contexts.

In preparation of the second round of pilot studies, we will offer an online teacher training course in February 2012 with the objective of training teachers in different countries and institutions. The course will include: a) An introduction to basic concepts of online teaching and communication b) Use of the SpeakApps tools for oral production and interaction c) Design of tasks for oral production and interaction d) Designing and sharing materials under a Creative Commons license. Participants in this course can then re-use and adapt all the materials and content to the specific needs of their own context and target language in order to train other teachers in their same setting.

Further iterative cycles of developments for tools following pilots will take place throughout the second year of the project, and the translation for all tools interfaces will be completed before the end of February 2012. A major development project is the author and teacher interface for tandem tool, which will be piloted during the Spring of 2012 for usability purposes and integrated into the Moodle platform before the start of the third round of pilot studies in September 2012.

Two major undertakings take priority during the second part of the project: 1) the design and evaluation of pedagogical activities suitable for the tools developed, and 2) building an online community of teachers and developers using Mahara. A community of teachers and developers is crucial to ensuring the sustainability of the project so that the sharing and exchange of activities is not interrupted by the end of the project and the updating and continued development of the technology is guaranteed.

In terms of dissemination we will launch a more intensive communication campaign around our website from February onwards coinciding with the publishing of results and outcomes of WP2 and WP3 which will inform the community of teachers and developers on user requirements and needs, and pedagogical design.

During the first year of the project we have focused on reaching teachers in order to have an impact on as large as possible number of students. We also need to address developers by the end of the project. In addition, even if not included explicitly in the proposal, a natural development is to address students engaged in informal or independent learning, and set up the mechanisms for reaching these students. We plan to do this by offering access to the tools, activities and guides without the need to enrol for a particular course or be assigned to a teacher, and offer opportunities to contact other students to communicate and practice the language with.

Finally, guidelines for new languages, activities and tools will be developed during the second year of the project in order to promote the inclusion of other languages to the SpeakApps environment. This result will be available at the end of the project period, December 2012.

6. Contribution to EU policies

1. To help improve the quality, attractiveness and accessibility of opportunities for lifelong learning: We follow a user-centered design process: requirements gathering in WP2, design and development in WP3 and evaluation in WP4. This design ensures that the project outputs are usable for everybody and that users' needs, wants and limitations are addressed. By using ICT within a web 2.0 framework, SpeakApps also ensures that it will be open and reach a wider audience.

2. To reinforce the contribution of lifelong learning to social cohesion, active citizenship, intercultural dialogue, gender quality and personal fulfilment: These aspects are addressed by fostering an autonomous learning process of speaking skills using ICT-based services and culturally appropriate content through a multilingual and multicountry platform.

3. To contribute to increased participation in lifelong learning by people of all ages, including those with special needs and disadvantaged groups, regardless of their socio-economic background: Accessible and usable online ICT-based services represent an easy-to-use access to foreign language learning and make it possible for distance learners to go beyond self-study by joining online learner groups guided by a teacher.

4. To promote language learning and linguistic diversity: This is one of the pillars of the project by providing a holistic and multilingual platform for target language use. SpeakApps project developments are focused in two respects: 1) providing ICT-based content and services to improve the speaking skills related to foreign language acquisition; 2) a multilingual and unique platform and community that by its characteristics will also promote awareness on linguistic diversity. From its beginnings, SpeakApps will work with 6 languages (widely and less widely taught languages). Moreover, a long-term goal of the Community is set in place the mechanisms for easy inclusion of new languages through user contributions.

5. To support the development of innovative ICT-based content, services, pedagogies and practice for lifelong learning: This is a key element, all project outputs are innovative ICT-based content, services and pedagogies for the practice and improvement of speaking skills in a foreign language.

SpeakApps also includes KA2 specific actions: awareness raising activities (by improving access to language learning facilities), and development and dissemination of language learning materials.

