

## Conference Paper

# Old Software, New Purpose: Exploring *PPT* for Interactive Language Learning

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## Abstract

*Microsoft PowerPoint (PPT)* has frequently been used in language classes to present texts, pictures, animation, audio, and videos. The presentation software is extremely popular because it is available in most computers, easy to use, and supports multimedia. Yet it is seldom used to create instructional materials and media that allow language learners to be active and that encourage them to be more independent learners. The paper aims to stimulate language teachers to scrutinize the software to rediscover its potentials for language learning. The features provided in *PPT* allow language learners to explore, provide and record responses, and to receive feedback while they are in slideshow mode. In this paper, four *PPT* features – animations, *ActiveX*, hyperlinks, and pointer options – are explored in atypical manners and examples of language learning activities are presented to give language teachers ideas of what this old software can do to support language teaching and learning.

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## 1. Introduction

Although *PPT* has mainly been used as presentation software, it offers more than just one way interaction between presenters and their audiences, the type of communication commonly observed in presentations. It is potentially useful for supporting meaningful and interactive language teaching and learning. In [3] proposes that *PPT* can be used for initial teaching of ideas or concepts, practice and drill, review, and test. It is fair to say that *PPT* is an omnipresent software frequently used in language classes by teachers as well as students because it is available in almost all computers, it is easy to use and operate, it can be used to create interesting presentations, and files created using the software can easily be shared with others over emails, websites, or using flash disks. *PPT* projects can also be integrated into other programs to change its nature from a presentation tool to audiovisual instructional media. *PPT* files can easily be converted into a video format using screen capture technology such as the *Screencast-O-Matic*. Using the recently developed add-ons called *iSpring*, *PPT* can now be transformed into *Flash* and *HTML5* formats or converted into e-Learning courses. Yet, the long-standing software has too often been taken for granted. Taking into account the potentials of this old software, the paper aims to revitalize its use by

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inviting language teachers and practitioners to have another close look at its features to rediscover its capability for creating interactive language learning activities.

It can be suggested that there are at least three strong reasons for developing language learning activities using *PPT*: it supports multimedia presentation, it presents materials in a nonlinear way, and it supports interactive language learning activities. According to [6], multimedia can best be defined based on its presentation and the sensory modality it requires. Multimedia necessitates visual and auditory processing because they are presented not only in verbal modes, but also in pictorial modes. Ample support has been given to the use of multimedia in language learning because of the “modality effect” of multimedia learning which may assist learners to perform better when they receive information from various channels [9]. Multimedia formats are effective for language learning because the combined media (simultaneous sight, sound and text) make the target language input more salient (Meskill, 1996) which, according to [1], is one of the important factors that should be considered when developing multimedia Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) materials. The creation of multimedia-based instructional materials and media for language teaching and learning means that language teachers and learners no longer need to rely only on coursebooks [4]. Furthermore, in support of the employment of multimedia technology in language learning, [10] highlights that from the users’ point of view, there is an ever growing interest on the use of multimedia technology to enhance the language learning experiences of learners from various ages and backgrounds.

The combination of multimedia and hypermedia technology allows computer-based language learning materials to be presented in a nonlinear manner and audio, visual, and audio-visual inputs to be presented in sync. *PPT* can present materials in a nonlinear way using the hyperlink feature. The employment of hyperlinks, multimedia, and hypermedia technology can make language learning materials more interesting and interactive because of the distinctive structures, hierarchies and interactivities which are not present in linear language learning materials, such as course books [5, 8].

Although not as sophisticated as some commonly used authoring programs such as *Hot Potatoes*, *Macromedia Flash*, or *Autoplay Media Studio*, *PPT* can be used to create simple interactive language learning activities that allow language learners to explore, provide and record responses, and receive feedback while they are in the slideshow mode. The four features explored in the *PPT* project described in this paper are the animations, *ActiveX*, hyperlinks, and pointer options.

## 2. An Example of Interactive Language Learning Activities using PPT

This part of the paper presents a *PPT* project that contains 15 slides of interactive multimedia language learning activities. The activities are based on a story about Dave,

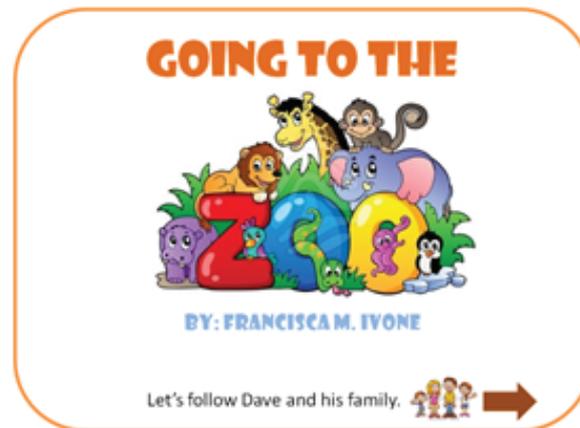


Figure 1: Title slide (Slide 1).

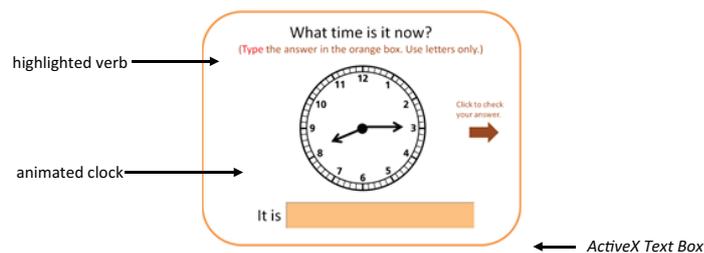


Figure 2: Fill in the blank activity (Slide 2).

a little boy who is going on a trip to the zoo with his family. The *PPT* project lets learners do reading and listening activities in the topics of describing time, following direction, naming animals, identifying parts of animals, and describing people. The pictures used in the project are taken from the Internet and the sources are acknowledged on the last slide. The project starts with a simple title page presented in Figure 1. By clicking the brown arrow, learners can go to the first activity on the second slide.

The story starts with an animation of a clock presented in Figure 2. The learners are asked to name the time by typing their answer in the *ActiveX Text Box*. This text box can only be filled when the *PPT* is in slideshow mode. When learners have filled the orange text box, they can go to the next slide (Figure 3) to check their answer. On the third slide, the story starts with a correct sentence of the enquired time.

Slide 3 presents the opening of Dave's story. On this slide the learners can read and listen to the text while it is being read by a narrator. To listen to the recording, they should click the speaker button. They can then click the brown arrow to follow Dave's trip from his house to the train station which is on Slide 4.

Slide 4 presents a listening activity (Figure 5). On this slide, the learners can listen to the recording by clicking the speaker button. The task requires them to find the train station by following Dave's trip from his house to the train station. They should do this by using the *Felt Tip Pen* provided in the pointer options. The pointer options can be activated in the slideshow mode by right clicking the mouse or touchpad, move the

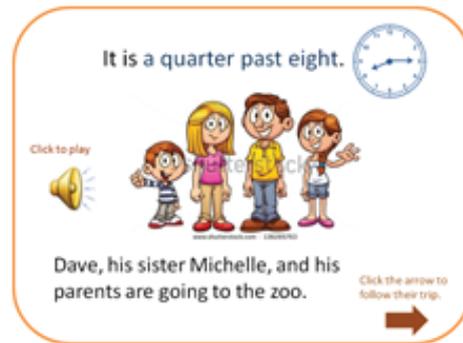


Figure 3: Listening and reading activity (Slide 3).

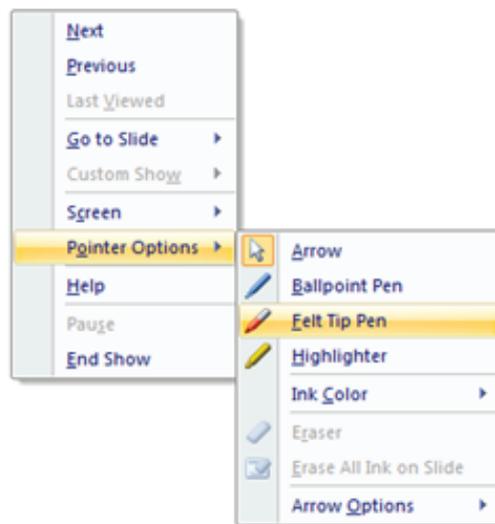


Figure 4: Listening and reading activity (Slide 3).

cursor to *Pointer Options*, then click the *Felt Tip Pen* (Figure 4). This will activate the *Felt Tip Pen*. Once the pen is active, the learners can draw the route from Dave’s house to the train station while listening to the recording. Once they have found the train station, they should deactivate the pen. To deactivate it, the learners should undergo the same steps, this time by clicking *Arrow* instead of *Felt Tip Pen*. They can then check their answer by clicking the *Answer Key* button. This click will trigger a red tick mark to appear on the position of the train station. Figure 5 presents Slide 4 before the learners do the activity and the completed slide that shows the route and the position of the train station. After the learners have completed the listening activity on Slide 4, they can click the brown arrow to go to the next slide.

The activity on Slide 5 is an identification activity that requires the learners to give multiple answers by clicking the appropriate *ActiveX Check Box*. Once they have completed the task, they can check their answers by clicking the *Answer Key* button. Figure 6 presents Slide 5 before the learners do the activity and the completed slide that shows the learners answers and the correct answers. After they have completed the activity on Slide 5, the learners can click the brown arrow to go to the next slide.

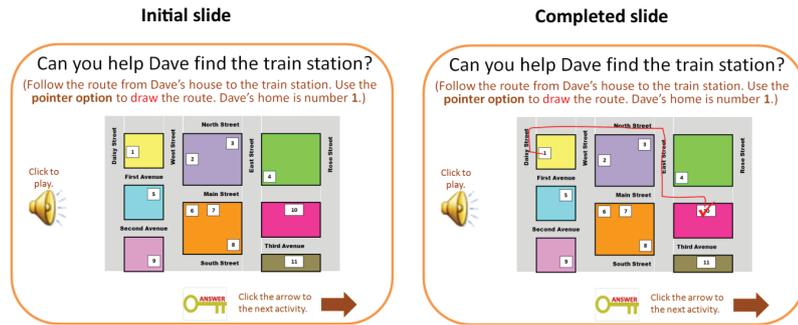


Figure 5: Listening and drawing route activity (Slide 4).

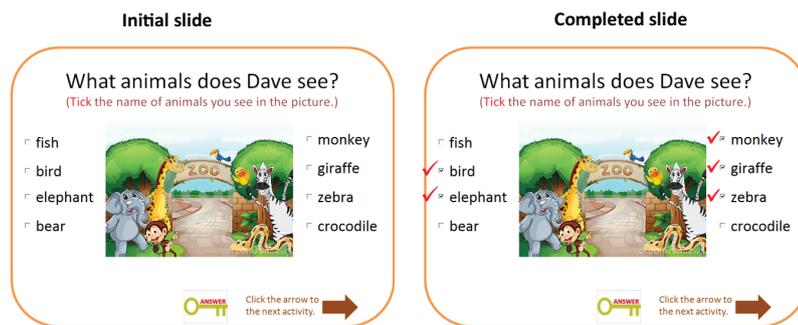


Figure 6: Choosing multiple options activity (Slide 5).

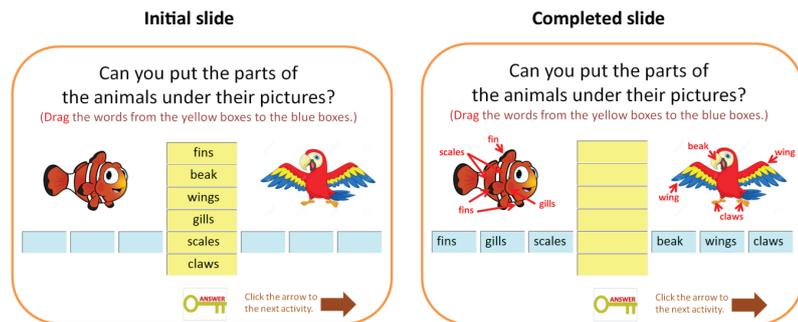


Figure 7: Drag and drop activity (Slide 6).

Slide 6 (Figure 7) presents a classification activity that requires the learners to drag words from the yellow boxes to the blue boxes under the pictures of fish and bird. They can check their answers by clicking the *Answer Key* button. Figure 7 presents Slide 6 before the learners do the activity and the completed slide that shows the learners answers and the correct answers. The correct answers are presented in a different way compared to those on Slides 4 and 5. After the learners check their answer, they can go to Slide 7 for another listening activity.

The listening activity on Slide 7 (Figure 8) requires the learners to number the animals based on the order they hear the names in the recording. They can check their answers by clicking the *Answer Key* button. Figure 8 presents Slide 7 before the learners do the activity and the completed slide that shows the learners answers and the correct

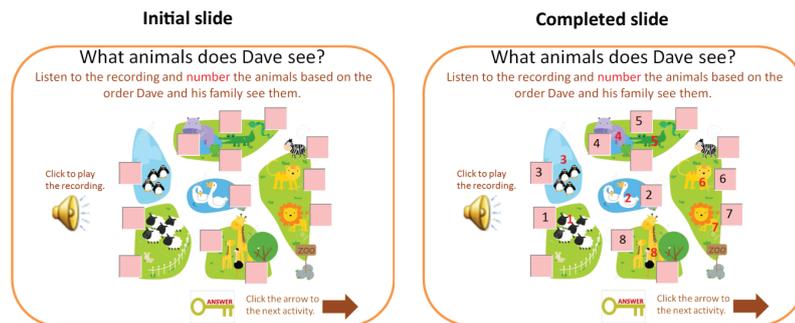


Figure 8: Listening activity in the form of numbering based on order (Slide 7).



Figure 9: Reading activity (Slides 8).

answers. After the learners check their answers, they can go to Slide 8 for a reading activity.

On Slide 8, the learners can click the pictures of Dave’s mother, father, and sister to trigger a bubble to appear. The bubble contains important information about Dave’s physical appearance on the day he was missing in the zoo. After reading the information inside of the three bubbles, the learners can click the brown arrow to go to Slide 9 to identify the correct picture of Dave. The next four slides (9-13) contain feedback about the learners’ choice of picture. Three of the choices are wrong because they do not fit Dave’s physical description given by his family. The differences between the picture of the three boys and Dave’s picture are given in the bubbles. When the learners have successfully found Dave’s picture, they can go to the *Credits* slide (Figure 11) which is presented on Slide 14 and then to the last slide which is the *Closing* slide (Figure 12).

This paper has described how the *PPT* software is used to create interactive multimedia language learning activities for beginners of English. In creating the *PPT* project, there are four important underlying principles of CALL and second language acquisition

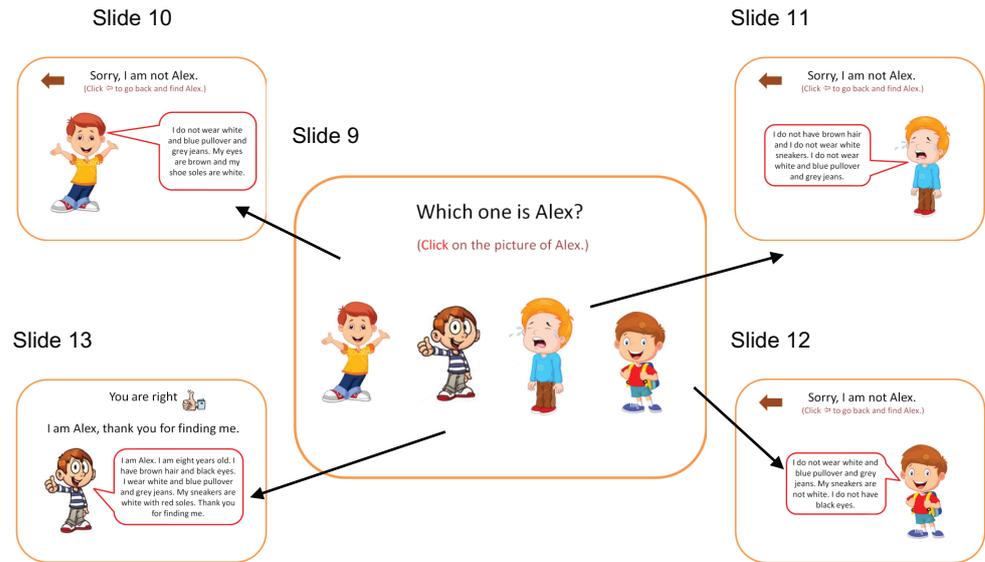


Figure 10: Picture identification activity and the feedback for the multiple choice item (Slides 9-13).



Figure 11: Slide 14 for credits for the pictures used in the project.

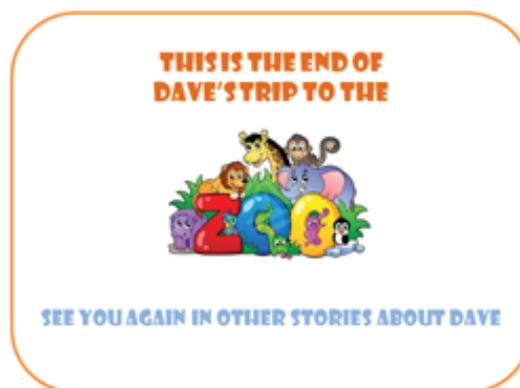


Figure 12: The Closing slide (Slide 15).

which are taken into considerations: making the language learning input salient, providing learners with the opportunity to interact with the materials, providing learners with the opportunity to produce the target language, and providing learners with the opportunity to monitor their own performance [1, 2].

## 2.1. Making the Language Learning Input Salient

Input needs to be made salient to attract learners' attention to a specific part of a slide. This can easily be done by highlighting, underlining, or making texts bigger than the rest of the text on the slide. Colours can also be used to make texts pop-up. One example of the use of colour to highlight texts and object is on Slide 3. Another technique that can be used to make the input more noticeable is by animating texts or objects. When texts or objects are animated, they will be given more attention by the learners because they observe motion on the slide. An example of the use of animation is when the learners click the *Answer Key* button to trigger the appearance of the animated answers. The animation feature can also be used to make the language learning inputs salient by revealing them in a specific order. On Slide 8, Dave's physical description is presented one by one depending on the pictures being clicked by the learners.

## 2.2. Providing Learners with the Opportunity to Interact with the Materials

Some *PPT* features, such as the pointer options can be used to let language learners interact with the language learning materials. Pointer options can be used to mark routes, circle answers, and underline words, cross words, highlight objects or words while the *PPT* is in the slideshow mode. An example of the use of pointer options is on Slide 4. On the slide, learners are given the chance to follow the direction given by the narrator by drawing a route from Dave's house to the train station. Learners can redo the activity when they do not succeed in finding the train station or drawing the route by erasing the lines and redraw them.

Hyperlinks can also be used to let learners interact with the language learning materials. By clicking objects or texts which are hyperlinked, learners can be directed to a website, a place in the document, other documents, or other media. Some examples of the use of hyperlinks in the *PPT* project are the hyperlinked arrows, speaker buttons, and links to some websites on Slide 14. Another example of hyperlink use is on Slide 9. The hyperlinked pictures enable learners to choose the correct picture of Dave and be taken to the feedback slides.

### 2.3. Providing Learners with the Opportunity to Produce the Target Language

*PPT* features, such as the *ActiveX* can provide learners with the opportunities to produce the target language by completing some simple tasks such as filling in gaps, giving short answers, ordering or reordering pictures or texts, and performing drag and drop activities, to name a few. On Slides 2, 5, 6, and 7, the use of *ActiveX Text Box* and *ActiveX Check Box* allows the learners to type or make a choice of answer while they are in the slideshow mode.

### 2.4. Providing Learners with the Opportunity to Monitor their Performance

Different types of feedback can be created on the *PPT* slides to give learners the opportunity to check their answers. The six activities in the *PPT* project present the correct answers differently. In the first activity (Slide 2), learners can check their answers by going to the next page and read the first sentence of Dave's story. In the second and third activities (Slides 4 and 5), the answers are given in the form of red tick marks on the correct answers. In the fourth activity (Slide 6), the answers are given by labeling the pictures of fish and bird. In the fifth activity (Slide 7), the answers are given by revealing the numbers on the pictures of animals. In the last activity (Slides 9-13), the learners are given the reasons why their choices are right or wrong. All feedback is presented when requested by the learners. They can do this by clicking the hyperlinked buttons or by clicking an object to perform a simple animation that reveals the answers.

## 3. Conclusions and Suggestions

*PPT* makes it possible for language teachers to create multimedia language learning materials and media which are both interactive and attractive, provide learners with control, enable self-assessment, permit multiple complementary inputs, allow simultaneous access of inputs, and address the different needs of different learning styles of different proficiency levels and age. All it takes is the willingness of teachers to spend a little bit of time to use *PPT* in atypical manner for designing and creating interactive language learning activities. Thus language teachers and practitioners are invited to take another look at the features provided in this old presentation software and approach it from a different perspective to uncover its potentials for language teaching and learning.

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