

Internet Homework assignments for Heritage Language Speakers and Learners

Dr. Olenka Bilash



Since the invention of the Internet in 1969, and the global deployment of the world wide web on top of the Internet around 1995, no other technology has had such a profound impact on global change. In only one generation, the world has distinguished what Rupert Murdoch called "digital natives" versus "digital immigrants." (2005) The former take modern Internet connectivity for granted, as an integral part of modern society. Anyone under 25 or 30 years of age is likely a digital native; our youth have grown up with cell phones, computers, laptops, notebooks, digital games. . . and the change is just beginning. While the digital immigrants are just becoming comfortable with distance between, and separation of, peoples being measured by time and bandwidth of modern digital communications (instead of miles, kilometers or timezones), more profound changes are emerging because of how culture and language are transcended by immediate connection of events and real-time interaction and even translation of languages. Few homes are without internet these days, but are heritage language teachers taking advantage of what the internet can offer? In addition to providing up to date information about language and culture

teaching methods and strategies and limitless other news and entertainment topics in many languages, the internet is an important tool for language use for the heritage language (HL) learner and speaker. In fact, as a flexible tool that can be accessed at any hour of any day, the internet's appeal increases with a learner's age. Whether a digital native or digital immigrant, HL instructors cannot avoid using the internet; further, by integrating HL internet use into their instruction they can become models of technology use in the HL and open innumerable doors to their students. Because some HL schools may have limited access to computers during classtime, this paper will focus on using the computer as a part of homework assignments. As such, it is designed to increase the HL learner's exposure to the HL, to teach learners about what the internet can offer them in their HL, to expose students to appropriate authentic materials, and to add novelty to and increase curiosity about the rest of the world that speaks the HL.

To begin integrating the internet into HL homework assignments requires four steps : gaining parental support, searching for appropriate websites, designing appropriate tasks, and creating classtime to report on the

assigned tasks within the classroom.

Gaining parental support

Because the internet is so accessible and offers information on such a wide array of topics, not always suitable for children or adolescents, families carefully monitor what their children are viewing. Thus it is necessary for the HL instructor and administration to work closely with parents about homework that involves internet use. It may be useful to write parents a note to introduce the series of internet homework projects. See Appendix A.

Distributing homework assignments through email may also be an effective strategy for several reasons. By sending a message to both the HL student and his/her parents everyone has equal access to the same information. Parents will know which sites their children are supposed to be visiting. Second, everyone will be free to share interesting sites in the HL with one another. you can educate all members of the family about websites in the HL. Parents and students may be able to introduce you, and other families to additional useful websites. And, of course, using email is eco-friendly and saves the use of

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paper!

Be sure to check with parents for permission and support in 1) giving internet homework assignments and, 2) in exchanging information through email.

Searching for appropriate websites

While there is no shortage of websites in most languages of the world, not all sites are appropriate to every audience. In order to find sites that will interest your students you may have to spend 3- 5 hours searching (or more). At first this may feel tedious but when you experience the surprises you find and see the excitement of your students when you direct them to these sites, you will no doubt feel that the time was well spent. Think of the time you are searching as a good investment: you are improving your searching skills in the HL; you are finding sites you do NOT want students to visit and making a list of them; you are saving good sites for future use; and your creativity is being sparked by exposure to many new sites that you never knew existed.

Use the following criteria to help you select sites for your students :

1. Is the language level of the site appropriate for

your students ?

2. Is the content appropriate for your students' age and interests?
3. Is the site easy to navigate or explore? Are there too many links?
4. Does the content fit with and complement themes you are covering in your HL classes?
5. How much time would it take for students to do an activity on the site?

Finding Useful Sites

The following ten types of websites may help both digital natives and digital immigrants get started looking for appropriate HL websites. Remember: be cautious about sending your students to a site that you have not visited yourself AND avoid giving an assignment such as find an internet site about (topic) and read it. Sites that are above the language ability of your students may be disappointing or frustrating for them. **Note :** if you type in English words in the GOOGLE search box most of the sites you find will be in English – for English speakers to learn your HL. If you type in words in your own language the sites will be in the HL. Also, you may switch to GOOGLE searches in any language by adding the suffix of a country to the search. For

example, instead of <http://www.google.com/> , I can access Japanese websites through <http://www.google.co.jp/> or Pilipinas websites through <http://www.google.com.ph/> or Ukrainian websites through <http://www.google.com.ua/> .

1. **Songs:** The internet is a rich source of music and lyrics. If you go to youtube you can look for songs that fit the themes you are studying in class.
2. **Pronunciation:** A variety of pronunciation sites also exist. They typically offer students a visual depiction of a word, its spelling and pronunciation. To see what I mean check out this site in French. Then you will know what you are looking for in your own language : <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJ80vZpo8XY>
3. **Games :** Many language games sites can be found by searching google using the following key words : (*your language*) *language games level (beginner,*

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intermediate, advanced)

e.g. My search for *Spanish language games beginners* yielded the following sites:



Spanish language games beginners X Search

About 4,370,000 results (0.20 seconds) Advanced search

Spanish language learning games
Materials on this site are aimed at learners with **beginner** to intermediate levels of **Spanish**. There are a couple of vocabulary building **activities** for ...
www.digitaldialects.com/Spanish.htm - Cached - Similar

Foreign language learning for kids - Gaelic, Spanish, Polish, and ASL
Learn English words and phrases by playing these **Spanish/ English language learner games**. Each category of words/phrases below has 3 different **games** - jig ...
www.apples4theteacher.com/foreignlang.html - Cached - Similar

Best Spanish Websites
Spanish lessons for **beginners** and kids, learn Spanish **Spanish Language Games A** super new link so I put it at the top here. ...
www.uni.edu/becker/Spanish3.html - Cached - Similar

Games and Puzzles for Boosting Your Spanish Vocabulary
Here are some **games** and puzzles designed to boost your word knowledge. ... Free **Spanish Language** Newsletter! Sign Up. Explore **Spanish Language**. Must Reads. Lessons for **Beginners** · Increasing Your Vocabulary · Verb Tenses ...
spanish.about.com/.../vocabularygamesandpuzzle/Games_and_Puzzles_for_Learning_Vocabulary.htm - Cached - Similar

BBC - Languages - Spanish
Complete **beginner, Spanish** expert or somewhere in between? Open/close ... A video introduction to the **language** in 10 short parts. **Spanish** news ...
www.bbc.co.uk/languages/spanish/ - Cached - Similar - Add to iGoogle

Spanish
Spanish language tests contains quizzes and essays on **Spanish language** literature Use our free information and **beginner** Spanish lessons to introduce ... Free online **spanish games** and tool with audio by native speakers to help you ...
www.shambles.net/pages/learning/mfl/spanish/ - Cached - Similar

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[Spanish Lessons - A to Z Home's Cool Homeschooling Foreign Languages](http://homeschooling.gomilpitas.com/explore/spanish.htm)

Spanish Course for Beginners The Embassy of Spain is pleased in introducing ... **Language Express Spanish Game** Flash **Spanish game** for those who have a pretty ...
homeschooling.gomilpitas.com/explore/spanish.htm - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

[Spanish Games](http://www.gamequarium.com/spanish.htm)

sparkle **Spanish Games** sparkle 300+ Education Sites! ... **LANGUAGE ARTS | MATH MUSIC | SCIENCE | SOCIAL STUDIES | SITE INFO | LINKS | STUDENT-CREATED GAMES | ...**
www.gamequarium.com/spanish.htm - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

[Free Spanish Lessons](http://www.123teachme.com/learn_spanish/beginner/)

learn **spanish!** Test Yourself. **Beginner?** Intermediate? Fluent? Alphabet. Alphabet & Pronunciation ... **Spanish and English. Memory Games. Dining Out. Phrases for eating out ... Medical Spanish. Talk with your patients in their language! ...**
www.123teachme.com/learn_spanish/beginner/ - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

It took me about 30 minutes to review the sites ; finally I liked this one best, and would be prepared to pay a nominal fee to access its contents:

<http://oye.languageskills.co.uk:80/index.html>

4. Videoclips:

Storytelling is an engaging way of learning and using a language. Some languages offer video-stories that students (and their families) might enjoy. E.g.
<http://www.learner.org/resources/series75.html?pop=yes&pid=395>

5. News: You may also explore news stations or newspapers. As a

starting point, try the British Broadcasting Channel (BBC) as they offer daily news and analysis in forty languages. See the site that pops up below.



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Of course, if you know the name of newspapers from other countries you may check them out, too. Here is what I found when I entered « newspapers India ». Note the languages that can access international, national and local évents.



India Local News

English | Bengali | Gujarati | Hindi | Kannada | Malayalam | Marathi | Telugu | Tamil | Punjabi

Regional English Newspapers

- [PTI News](#)
- [India Daily](#)
- [Tehelka](#)

New Delhi News

- [India Today](#) Delhi
- [Pioneer](#) New Delhi

Kolkata News (Calcutta)

- The Telegraph Calcutta Post
- [GanaShakti](#)

Goa News

- [Gomantak Times](#)
- [India Express](#)
- [Navhind Times](#)

Orissa News

- [Sambad](#)
- [Dharitri](#) Oriya
- [The Sentinel](#) English

Jammu & Kashmir News

- [Kashmir Observer](#)
- [Daily Excelsior](#)
- [Greater Kashmir](#)
- [Kashmir Times](#)

Others

- [Deccan Herald](#)
- [The Asian Age](#)
- [The Assam Tribune](#)
- [Bharat Samachar](#)
- [Daily Thanthi](#)
- [Patna Daily](#)
- [Ranchi Express](#)
- [Bihar Times](#) Bihar

Malayalam News (Kerala)

- [Malayalam Manorama Daily](#) Malayalam
- [Mathrubhumi](#)
- [Mangalam](#)
- [Kerala Express](#)
- [Deshabhimani Daily](#)
- [Deepika](#)
- [Kerala Kaumudi](#)
- [Malayala Varcha](#)

Punjabi Newspapers Punjab

- [The Tribune](#) Chandigarh, Punjab
- [Ajit Weekly](#)
- [Ajit Jalandhar](#)
- [Weekly newspaper in Gurmukhi](#)

Regional Language Newspapers

Bengali Newspapers West Bengal

- [Dainik Suprovat](#)
- [Aaj Kaal](#)
- [Sambad](#)
- [AnandaBazar Patrika](#)

Gujarati Newspapers (Gujarat)

- [Gujarat Samachar](#)
- [Sambhaav](#)
- [Sandesh](#)
- [Divya Bhaskar](#)
- [Bombay Samachar](#)
- [Akila News](#)

Hindi Newspapers (North India)

- [Dainik Jagran](#) Hindi
- [Nai Dunia](#) Indore
- [Dainik Bhaskar](#)
- [NavBharat Times](#)
- [Amar Ujjala](#)
- [Rashtriya Sahara](#)
- [Rajasthan Patrika](#)

Kannada Newspapers Karnataka

- [Sanjevani](#)
- [Udayavani](#)
- [Kannada Prabha](#)
- [Prajavani](#)

Marathi Newspapers Maharashtra

- [Kesari](#)
- [Lokmat](#)
- [Loksatta](#)
- [Maharashtra Times](#)
- [Dainik Aikya](#)
- [Pudhari](#)
- [Sakal](#)
- [Tarun Bharat Daily](#)

Telugu Newspapers (Andhra Pradesh)

- [Eenadu](#)
- [Vaartha](#)
- [Andhra Prabha](#)
- [Andhra Bhoomi](#)
- [Andhra Jyothy](#)

Tamil Newspapers (Tamil Nadu)

- [Ananda Vikatan](#)
- [Dinakaran](#)
- [Dinamalar](#)
- [Kumudam](#)
- [Viduthalai](#)
- [Thinaboomi](#)

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6. Advertisements: Do some comparative shopping by finding the prices of common items through on line flyers. For example, IKEA provides catalogues on line at their site in each country. Here are a few to examine:

- a. <http://www.ikea.com/it/>
- b. http://www.ikea.com/ms/en_CA/FSI/index.html
- c. <http://www.ikea.com/de/de/>
- d. <http://www.ethosksa.com/ikea.com.sa/index.php?lang=ar>
- e. <http://www.ikea.com/ru/>

7. Youtube: If you find some youtube videoclips you will be a real hit with your students. Music, dance, cooking shows, fashion shows, TV newscasts – everything is accessible. Some

even feature students who are Learning your HL and may inspire your own students to create something for youtube. For example, check this one out : <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9SNdugDM47Q>

8. Background

knowledge: It is always beneficial to learn more about a HL, its cultural roots and its speakers around the world. The following websites offer interesting information in English and may also be useful to parents in an inter-ethnic marriage.

- a. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/german/>
- b. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/italian/>
- c. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/other/quickfix/swedish.shtml>
- d. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/>

- e. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/other/portuguese/quickfix/>
- f. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/other/quickfix/russian.shtml>
- g. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/other/quickfix/ukrainian.shtml>
- h. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/spanish/quickfix/>
- i. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/polish/>
- j. http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/european_languages/languages/polish.shtml

9. Translation :

Translation sites are multiplying in and between many languages. Students may enjoy inputting words and phrases and finding out their equivalents in the HL. These sites may also be useful to HL

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instructors to help expand their own vocabulary! An online dictionary is also useful when reading some websites.

10. Surprises: Perhaps the most rewarding aspect of searching the internet is the

surprises you find. When you are looking for one thing, something else may show up and although it may not be what you were looking for, it may be a real treasure for future use. For example, when I was looking

for German songs, I found this site : <http://german.about.com/popular.htm> The hour that it took to click on each link went by like a few minutes!

11.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <http://german.about.com/popular.htm>. The page title is "About.com German Language: Most Popular Articles". The browser's address bar shows the URL and search engines like Reader and Google. The page content includes a navigation menu with "Home", "Education", and "German Language". A banner advertisement reads "If it's about the difference between a whim and a passion" with the "About.com NEWSLETTERS" logo and a "SIGN-UP" button. Below the banner, the page title "About.com : German Language" is displayed, along with a search bar containing "German language songs interme" and a "SEARCH" button. Navigation links for "German Language", "Start Learning", and "Practice & Perfect" are visible. The main heading is "German Language: Most Popular Articles", followed by the text "These articles are the most popular over the last month." Three article links are listed: "German for Beginners: Lesson 1 - Greetings and Courtesies", "German for Beginners: Lesson 1 - An online course with references designed for beginners and intermediate learners who wish to review.", and "German for Beginners: Das Abc - The German Alphabet". A "Sponsored Links" section follows, listing "Teach Language in Japan?", "German Military Antiques", and "German Books". On the right side, there is a "Free German Language Newsletter!" sign-up form with an "Enter email address" field and a "SIGN UP" button. Below this is an advertisement for "About.com Stay-at-Home Moms E-Course" featuring a photo of two women and a "START NOW" button. At the bottom right, there is a "German Ads" section with links for "Language" and "Free German Lessons".



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[10 Ways to Say 'Thank You'](#)

Expanding your German vocabulary - 10 ways to say 'thank you' (and 'you're welcome') in German.

[German for Beginners: Contents - Free online German course - German lessons](#)

German for Beginners - A free online German course with lessons and references designed for beginners and intermediate learners.

[German Numbers - Counting in German - Mathematics](#)

An English-German guide to German dates, the calendar, numbers, telling time and counting - Part 1.

[German Preposition Quiz 1](#)

A self-scoring quiz on German prepositions.: preposition quiz german prepositions german verbs german games document url

[German Surnames with English Meanings A-K - German Last Names](#)

A glossary of Germanic last names and their English meanings. Part One A-K.

[Hundekommandos - Dog Commands in German](#)

A guide to training your dog to obey German dog commands.

[German Language Lab - Audio - Listen to German](#)

German audio for listening practice. An online language lab with exercises and more. Part of German for Beginners.

[German Words of Love and Romance - I love you](#)

A special German-English phrasebook for the vocabulary of love and romance in German. How to say 'I love you' in German.

[Special Character Chart for German \(1\)](#)

Part One of a keyboard-code chart for typing special German characters and symbols on a PC or Mac computer.

- [Learn German Grammar](#)
- [Learn Speak Language](#)
- [German](#)

Making appropriate tasks

Now that you have found some sites that you find interesting, it is time to plan the tasks you will offer students. It may be a good idea to start with short tasks to offer encouragement and intrigue and then expand into more time-consuming and open ended tasks.

Ten sample assignments follow :

1. Ask students to go to a site and listen –watch it for 2-5 minutes. (e.g. a short song or youtube clip)
2. You could provide students with a list of

words in your HL and ask them to find their English translations.

3. Students may also enjoy translating words and phrases from English into the HL. They could even report back on the words they explored.
4. Use introductory guiding questions to help students explore some of the keys links on a website and learn how to navigate it in the HL. E.g. – - *Near the bottom right hand side of the article, you should see*

a speaker icon with the title “Ecoutez avec ReadSpeaker” beside it. Click on the icon: Do you hear the article being read aloud?

OR, beside the title of the article, you should see an envelope icon with the title “Envoyez par mail”. Click on that icon and email the article to yourself: Did you receive the article in your inbox?

5. Go to a specified website. Are there any photos? If so, what do they

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show? (e.g. <http://www.metrofrance.com> or <http://www.publimetro.com.mx/> or <http://www.metronews.it/> or <http://www.metro.se/> or <http://www.publimetro.cl/> or <http://www.metronieuws.nl/>.

6. After students have had a chance to explore a website and know where to find information, homework assignments could consist of written summaries or reviews of articles.
7. Students may be asked read anything on a given site for 10 minutes. After this type of free reading they might be asked to report on what they chose. E.g. . I liked _____ because.....
8. Students could be asked to read information on a website for a class discussion on current events.
9. Go to a newspaper site and ask students to report on sports scores, team names or sport interests. Remember that the news changes daily so they will have to report the date of their search. And the HL instructor may have to check for news daily to

confirm the accuracy of the homework.

10. Send students to a website link to listen to a song in the HL (perhaps on youtube). At the same time you can send the lyrics to the song with some words missing, a type of close activity. The students' task is to listen to the song and fill in the blanks. It is just as important that they do the task (which may take listening to the song several times and thereby developing a liking for the song) as it is to fill in the blanks with the correct spelling. Some students may even wish to replicate this activity on their own or transcribe the lyrics of one of their favorite songs in the HL and send it to peers to listen to and/or complete.

Following up on the assigned tasks within the classroom

Students should always have an opportunity to report on homework assigned, or else they may not do it in the future. The best time to do so is at the beginning of the class. Provide a structure and time limit for reporting.

Final words

HL programs can offer students both growth in their HL as well as increased intercultural competence and human understanding.

One final reason

More and more people are empowered by rapid and diverse perspectives on everything from natural disasters to political upheaval, as the control of media evaporates. HL programs can offer students both growth in their HL as well as increased world knowledge and intercultural competence and human understanding. Some research (Pollman, 2009) argues that wealthy children have more access to intercultural capital through travel, language lessons and discussions with well travelled parents and suggests that much of the responsibility for developing this competence lies with the teacher.

Multilingual globally astute HL instructors can provide such intercultural competence through internet homework assignments.

The internet provides a wide range of 'information' – from entertainment to news to recipes. How you use it is limited only by your own creativity. Young people are on the internet daily; why not have them doing so in

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the HL! Since new websites are regularly added to the internet, you may even spark more communication between students and/or generations in the HL than you had anticipated.

NOTE: Youtube and other websites are not always permanent, so you may find that

some of the sites recommended in this article are not accessible. Apologies in advance.

References

Murdoch, Rupert. "Speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors." American Society of

Newspaper Editors. 13 Apr. 2005. Speech.

Pollmann, A. (2009). Formal education and intercultural capital: Towards attachment beyond narrow ethno-national boundaries? *Educational Studies*, 35(5), 537-545

Appendix A Sample Letter to parents

Dear Parents,

Since few homes are without internet these days, we at _____ school would like to include internet homework for your child. Each week we shall ask your child to check out a website and answer questions or find some information. In our next class each child will report on what they found. WE hope that this will increase the use of the HL between classes and maybe even spark more communication with parents or grandparents.

In order to make this assignment as eco-friendly as possible we propose sending the task to a child's email address and copying you. In this way you will know precisely what your child should be reviewing and can even check out the site on your own in advance.

We appreciate your cooperation in this innovative project and would happily answer any questions that you might have. Please send your permission by signing this form or by sending me an email to: (email address).

Sincerely,

Instructor
Name of School

