

INTERACTIVE ESL MULTIMEDIA ON THE INTERNET: A LOOK AT *SHOCKWAVE PLAYER* AND *VIVOACTIVE 2.0*

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Macromedia's "Shockwave Player" and VivoActive's "VivoActive 2.0" are essentially sets of plug-ins (software modules that add certain features or services to your browser) that once installed, enable real-time delivery ("streaming") of audio and video as an integrated component of a Web page. These two plug-ins may represent the best of Internet freeware designed to decompress and simultaneously distribute this information to your home computer. Combining audio and video streaming in a synchronized format, they enable educational and commercial developers to create sophisticated multimedia Web pages in a content-rich environment (using authoring tools such as: Macromedia's Shockwave Director, Authorware or Flash and VivoActive's Producer 2.0). Added to these features, Shockwave's Flash component also allows colorful animation and a high level of interactivity. Because both plug-ins reside within your browser's system files, you are not required to choose between one or the other when accessing Web pages. However, developers and language instructors interested in using this technology should be aware of how differences between these plug-ins may influence curriculum selection and/or development.

Shockwave's Player (1.08Mb) can be downloaded from [Macromedia](#) and is easily installed to your browser using the run command. Macromedia initially designed Shockwave for Netscape, but one can also find a Microsoft Internet Explorer version called ActiveX and a beta version for Marimba (please refer to Macromedia's homepage for further technical requirements). At Berkeley's [Call@Chorus](#), Jim Duber has utilized Shockwave to create interactive phonetic tasks which require second language learners to discriminate between minimal pairs after listening to streamed audio files as many times as s/he requires. In a highly engaging manner, this site also utilizes different interactive frames involving cloze sentences and cartoons which allow the learner to conceptualize prepositions in a spatially interactive environment.

Clicking over to [Takako's World](#) by Brian Rhodes is a must for those considering the use of Shockwave in a creative language instruction context. Using a cleverly developed interactive interface, the L2 learner negotiates a text while listening to a synchronized stereo-quality narration. Like the previous site mentioned, a task follows each section which elicits learner input; in this case the "quiz" utilizes text reconstruction in a modified cloze format. Additionally, when the L2 learner encounters difficulty, s/he can click on the hint function, which provides immediate feedback and generates context-relevant clues.

One hallmark of these sites is their compliance to Schreck and Schreck's (1991) "Phase 1 of Evaluating CALL Courseware," which states there should be an arrangement of text in meaningful, logical segments with emphasis on the most relevant or important information. At the Okanaga University College

Pronunciation Site, one will find Shockwave technology showcased in various pronunciation exercises employing minimal pair tasks, tongue twisters, and dictation. These eight different pronunciation units appear to comprise the cutting edge of ESL multimedia Internet technology.

[VivoActive's web site](#), in addition to listing its technical specifications and detailing compatibility issues, boasts numerous awards for its VivoActive 2.0 product (787 kb) since release earlier this year: PC Magazine's product of the week (April, 1997) and Editor's Choice (October, 1997). After comparing this plug-in to similar video/audio players: RealPlayer, VDO and even Shockwave, I was not surprised to find these awards well deserved. These reviews seem tied to three factors: ease of use, highly synchronized video and 16Kbps FM audio, and lastly, support of other streaming standards (there is no one industry standard). This simple but elegant application displays the phenomenal efficiency of VivoActive's development component (VivoActive Producer 2.0), which compresses data into AVI files and then

reorders them for broadcast. ViviActive's [gallery](#) of demonstrations also highlights the interactive capability of this plug-in and could conceivably serve as a basic prototype for educational developers. VivoActive's excellent streaming ability allows the developer to envision similar sites incorporating an appropriate ESL text or an instructor's lectures with video.

Overall, I found both Shockwave Player and VivoActive 2.0 extremely dynamic and progressive in their ability to engage the L2 learner in a meaningful and semi-authentic environment. VivoActive definitely utilizes a superior compression technology for the distribution of audio/video. Although Macromedia claims "little or no waiting time" in the delivery of its files, it was painfully apparent this was a hollow promise after I waited ten minutes for one set of Shockwave files and five minutes for another. I found VivoActive easier to use and more aesthetically pleasing both in its TV-like interface and in the quality of its audio and video output. However, when comparing the interactivity and quality of ESL-related sites using Shockwave, VivoAudio fails to measure up. As Internet technology evolves, we should continue to evaluate the interactivity and value new websites bring to the L2 learner and attempt to integrate these into a viable ESL curriculum.

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