

For Distance and Life-long Learning (2)

:Making Home Pages with MailWeb and WebMaker¹⁾

小林悦雄

Etsuo KOBAYASHI

長島忍

Shinobu NAGASHIMA

早瀬光秋

Mitsuaki HAYASE

下浦享

Susumu SHIMOURA

宮内敬太郎

Keitaro MIYAUCHI

This paper introduces how making home pages has been facilitated by two file transfer systems developed in a project funded by the Ministry of Education in Japan, which we call the MailWeb System and the WebMaker System. These two systems have made it possible for our students to create home pages easily, even when they have only limited access to a server.

Our students have been using the MailWeb System since 1997, and the WebMaker system since 1999 to make individual home pages. In doing so, they have been able to practice and enjoy writing English on their pages and communicating with other students across the world through the introduction of their works on the Internet.

The first MailWeb was developed and put into use in 1997. It is a system by which anybody can make web pages by simply sending e-mail written on an HTML format or an attached file to a web server, where the automatic web-creating program is running. The new and enhanced system, which no longer relies on e-mail, offers a CGI-run web page instead, from which registered users can send files to a server to be shown on the Internet instantly.

We will report how these two systems work and how we have been using them in our classes at Rikkyo University and Mie University.

1) This paper is based on the presentation made at the second Pan-Asian Conference held in Seoul on October 1, 1999. Part of the research was done on a grant from the Ministry of Education in Japan with Keitaro Miyuchi as the representative of the project. (Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (B), #09410126, 1997-1999)

I . Introduction

1. How the web page project started

Three of the authors (Kobayashi, Hayase and Nagashima) began their web page project in 1996. Nagashima started developing a file-transfer system on his Unix server, and Kobayashi and Hayase helped each other to find methods to teach their English classes through the Internet on a Macintosh server.

They found that the use of a www server could start online team teaching between different universities far from each other, in which a pair or a group of teachers can teach their classes by sharing ideas on how to teach.

In the spring semester 1997, in Kobayashi's and Hayase's English writing classes, the students wrote HTML files using basic tags on the computers in the computer room in each of the universities. Then they sent their files to the Macintosh server by Fetch on a Macintosh or by WINFTP on a Windows machine.

Then the students in both classes were encouraged to visit each other's pages and to write comments on them. They sent their comments to their partners by e-mail, and also put their comments on their home pages so that their partners could read them.²⁾

This way of teaching was new and exciting to the teachers as well as to the students. However, to the teachers there were always some complicated procedures to follow to prepare for their lessons.

The first problem was concerning registration of the students in the server. The teacher (Kobayashi) as the server administrator had to make their students' directories in the server. It was time-consuming because it was a manual operation by typing in each student's name and issuing his/her password one by one.

The second problem was the use of the ftp tools either on a Macintosh or on a Windows computer. It was a nuisance that each time the students had to designate the address of the server to connect to it. To save this repetitive operation, many of the students preferred keeping on the connection to the server by Fetch during the entire class hour, which resulted in the congestion because of the connection capacity on the part of the server.

In the meantime Nagashima was also having the same kind of problems in his computer-literacy course as a liberal-arts subject. His problems were more serious because of the very large size of his classes. He was teaching classes of more than 100 students at one time,

2) (*M. Hayase, E. Kobayashi, S. Nagashima(1998.1) Proceeding of the 1997 Korea TESOL Conference, January 1998, pp.61-67)

whereas the number of students of Kobayashi and Hayase ranged from 15 to 36.

2. The development of an effective file transfer system

We wanted to solve the problems mentioned above by adopting an effective file transfer system which could deal with a large number of students without causing any network congestion.

We needed to automate the process of making students' directories in a server because it was a time-consuming job for a teacher. We also wanted a system by which we did not have to worry about the malfunctioning of the server, around the clock.

For this purpose, Nagashima developed a program for his classes of computer literacy education by the end of 1996, and started using it in his classes the following year 1997. The first version of the program was for a Unix machine and the access to the program was limited to the users of the domain of Rikkyo University. Then at the end of 1997, the program was improved to the extent that it could work on an NT server which was purchased with a grant from the Ministry of Education in Japan (Keitaro Miyauchi as the representative of the project).³⁾

The program was further improved by Nagashima and was installed in the NT server, and Kobayashi and Hayase experimentally started using the system and found that it was much more convenient than to use Fetch or other ftp tools which their students had been using to send files to the Macintosh server.

The two English teachers started using the program for their writing classes for the spring semester in 1998, while Nagashima started developing still another new transfer system.

In the past joint projects, using the file transfer and management system, which we now call the MailWeb System, we think that we successfully developed a language learning and teaching support environment, utilizing the Internet, simply because the system was able to process a large number of students at one time.

In their writing classes, the MailWeb System facilitated the making of home pages in English. Because the system was able to transfer not only text files, but also sound and image files as the attached files by e-mail, it really helped the students to make their original web pages.

The system is also effective in dealing with very large size classes because students do

3) <http://toby.rikkyo.ac.jp/mailweb/>

not have to be connected to the server while they send their e-mail data. This is in contrast to the conventional file method (FTP), in which the server tends to become congested, because the users and the server are connected during and even after the data is sent as mentioned earlier.

Miyauchi also used the system to build a German online exercise archives in the server. Miyauchi's German exercise pages are frequently used by his students who are learning German.⁴⁾

II. What the MailWeb System is and how it is used

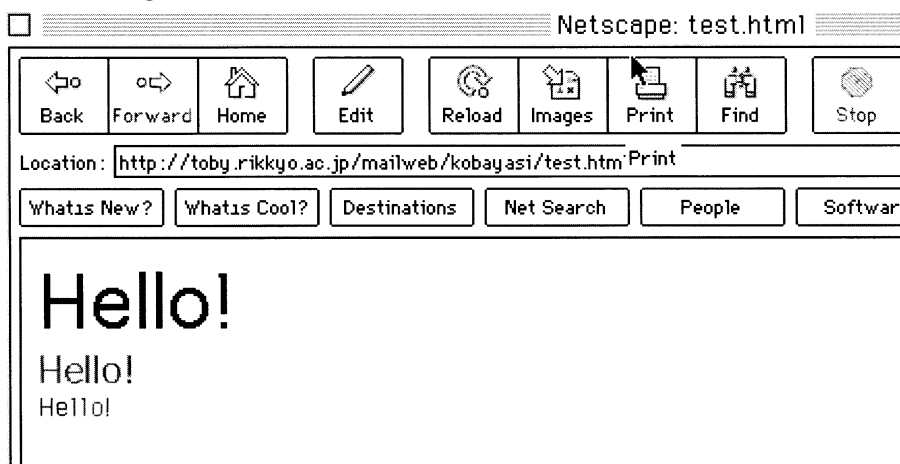
1. What does the system do?

The MailWeb System automatically shows on a web page an e-mail text written with HTML tags.

For example, if you write an e-mail message like the one below and send it with a name "test.html" to the program:

```
<html>
<font size=7>Hello!</font><br>
<font size=5 color=red>Hello!</font><br>
<font size=4 color=green>Hello!</font><br>
```

The program accepts the e-mail and automatically saves it in the sender's directory. The directory itself is also made automatically. Eventually anybody can see the file on a web browser at the designated address with the same user and file name, as shown below.

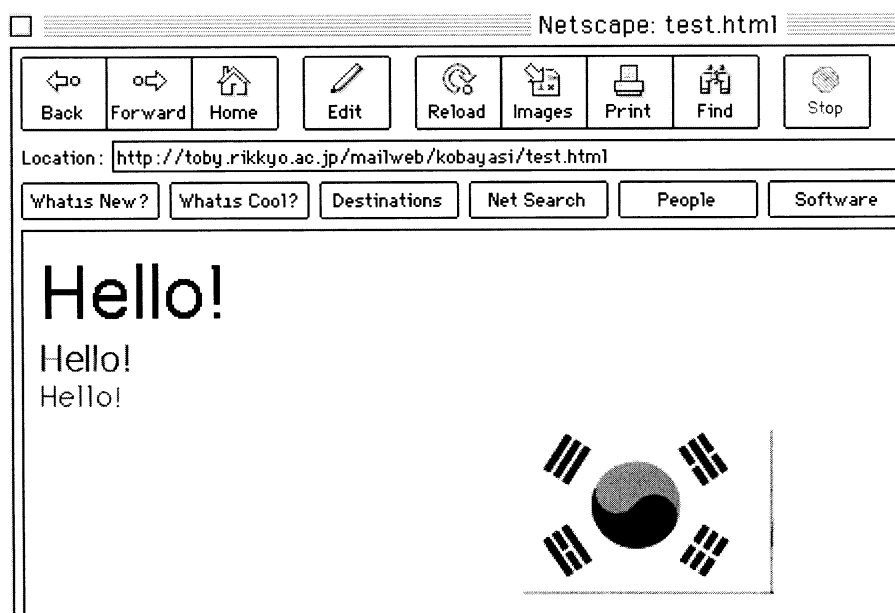


4) <http://toby.rikkyo.ac.jp/mailweb/german>

The MailWeb system can also accept an image file sent as an attachment. Therefore if you send an image file with a name such as “test.gif” and put the tag `<img src=test.gif>` in the text file and send both the image file and text file to the program,

```
<html>
<font size=7>Hello!</font><br>
<font size=5 color=red>Hello!</font><br>
<font size=4 color=green>Hello!</font><br>
<center><img src=test.gif></center>
```

The text and image are combined together and are shown on one web page.



To summarize, it is a method to send a file to a server, and the sender can keep the files in his own directory in the server, and can show them on web pages.

This means that a server, which has this program running in it, can accept HTML files or even image files, and as long as the users have their own e-mail accounts and can send e-mail, they can easily make their home pages. The idea of using e-mail to send files, which is common today as we do with pictures and documents as attachments, is a simple but a very good idea because it makes use of the most common network tool, that is e-mail, which anybody can and should be able to use. It also makes it possible to deal with a very large class, because the learners do not have to keep their machines and the server connected all the time.

The users do not have to worry about the Intranet facilities and tools to create their own web pages as long as they can send e-mail to a certain address. It is a great merit that the teacher and students can use their time and energy only on the content of the pages.

2. How can an e-mail message be sent and accepted to the program?

The program is written in 1500 lines of the C language. It can be placed and working in a Unix PC server or an NT4 server. First the e-mail message is sent to a certain address in a mail server. When the mail comes in to the mail server, it is forwarded to the MailWeb program and the program interprets messages and executes the commands one by one. If there is no directory of the new user, another program written in 500 lines of the C language automatically makes one for him/her, which saves the administrator's labor.

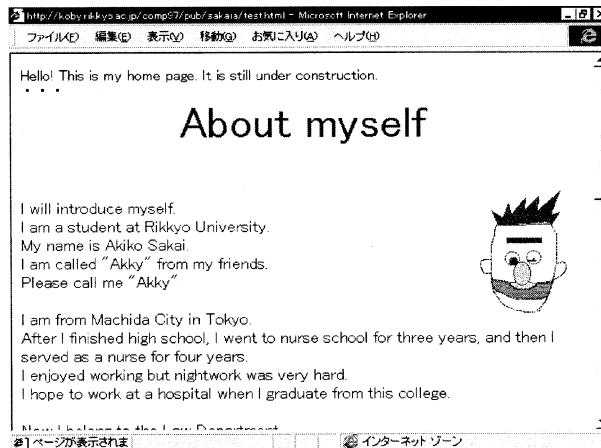
III. How home page making can be facilitated by the MailWeb System⁵⁾

1. Home-page exchange as a task

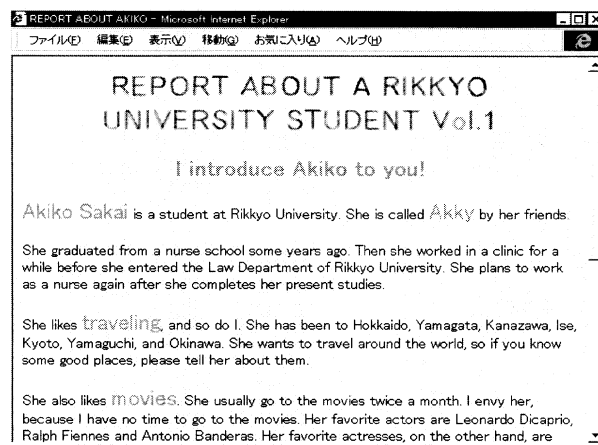
Here we will examine our home page exchange as a task of the TBLT (task-based language teaching). According to Nunan (1989:10), a task can be defined as "a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is primarily focused on meaning rather than form." As discussed in Section I, since 1997, we have been conducting a home page exchange using our MailWeb System. In the homepage exchange, Kobayashi's and Hayase's students write compositions on given topics and put them on their home pages with relevant pictures, drawings, and sound files. Then, Kobayashi's students visit homepages by Hayase's students, write comments on the home pages they visit, and put those comments pages on their home pages so that Hayase's students can visit them. The reverse is done by Hayase's students for Kobayashi's students, thus making the task a kind of home page exchange.

The following is an example of a home page exchange. The first page was created by Akiko, a Rikkyo University student. The second page was created by Chihiro, a Mie University student commenting on Akiko's page.⁶⁾

5) This section is for the most part a translation from a section in the following article written in Japanese by Mitsuaki Hayase and Etsuo Kobayashi, two of the present authors: "From Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT)" (in print), *Philologia* 31, a journal of English Research Society of Mie University. The purpose of the translation is to give an opportunity to read it to people who understand English.



Page by Akiko, a Rikkyo University student



Page by Chihiro, a Mie University student,
commenting on Akiko's page

Nunan(1989:11-12) claims that each task includes the following six components: goal, input, activity, teacher role, learner role, and setting.

He exemplifies these components in a pre-listening task as shown below.

Goal: Exchanging personal information

Input: Questionnaire on sleeping habits

6) <http://koby.rikkyo.ac.jp/comp98/comp98.html>

<http://koby.rikkyo.ac.jp/comp97/pub/hayase/mitsu.html>

Activity: i) Reading questionnaire
 ii) Asking and answering questions about sleeping habits

Teacher role: Monitor and facilitator

Learner role: Conversational partner

Setting: Classroom/pair work

Our home-page exchange task can also be shown using Nunan's task framework.

Goal: Information exchange on the homepage

Input: Home pages created by the students of the other university

Activity: i) Reading the home pages by the students of the other university
 ii) Writing the comments on the home pages
 iii) Putting the comments on the home pages
 iv) Reading the comments written by the students of the other university

Teacher role: i) Helping the students with their English composition
 ii) Helping the students with their home page making

Learner role: partners in home-page exchange

Setting: Environment where the Internet is accessible

This framework helps both the teachers and learners to understand the nature of the task and their roles. There can be sub-tasks in a task as Doi (1995, 312) points out. In the home page exchange, writing the initial composition to be read by a partner student is a sub-task. Also, following the home page exchange, some students exchange emails, which is also considered to be a sub-task.

2. Feedback from the students on the home page exchange

In late-June 1997 we asked the students (Kobayashi's nine students and Hayase's ten students) for their opinions about the home-page exchange. Also in July 1999, Hayase asked his eleven students about the home page exchange. Some of the main positive opinions are as follows:

- I am pleased with the present learning environment where students at two different universities are studying together using the Internet. We can encourage each other.
- Realizing the fact that we at two different universities are making home pages using the

same MailWeb System helps me work harder in making a better home page.

- I really enjoy learning the hobbies and specialties of other students.
- It is interesting to know what students at a different university are doing academically.
- I get many nice ideas about home page making by visiting the homepages of other students.

There are negative and constructive opinions as well and they are:

- I would like to choose my partner by myself, rather than the teacher making up the pair automatically.
- It is very challenging to write comments on the homepage created by a total stranger.
- There was not enough information on the homepage I was assigned to, which made it difficult for me to write comments.
- I would like to receive comments on the comments I wrote.

3. For the improvement of the home-page exchange

In order to better the home page exchange in the future, the following points should be taken into consideration, based on the opinions by the students and the reflection on the part of the teachers.

- (1) Care should be taken so that everybody writes comments and everybody gets comments. In order to do so, it is essential to make pairs. An automatic pair making is not welcome by some students. A student self-selection, however, is not the best solution, either, because through this selection there must be some students whose home pages are not visited by anybody. So, first the teachers automatically make pairs, and then, students are welcome to write comments on the home pages of their choice, if they wish.
- (2) It is naturally important to put enough information on home pages, which helps the writers to comment. It is also important to inform of the students at the beginning of the semester of the objective of the home page exchange. This information at the beginning encourages students to write a lot and to write well.
- (3) The students should be encouraged to send their feedbacks on the comments for their home pages by email. This is particularly important when there are questions in the comments.

IV. Co-relations between home-page making in English and improvement of English writing skills

In 13 to 14 lessons per semester, Kobayashi's students are given six to seven topics to write about and then, after their first drafts being checked by him, they put their refined compositions on their home pages. There are 35-36 students in one writing class at Rikkyo University, and if a teacher teaches two such classes he/she has a hard time in checking all their writings.

In 1997 Kobayashi put his corrections for each composition written by his students on the Web, but he found it rather time-consuming. In the following year in 1998, he did not edit their works although there were a few complaints from advanced learners for his just letting them write as they liked. In 1999, however, he corrected their first drafts written on a sheet of paper, then the students put the corrected and improved compositions on their web pages.

He now thinks that it is better for a teacher to correct mistakes in his students' compositions typed out, hoping that they will notice what is wrong where they are corrected, when they rewrite it on their web pages.

To be able to see his/her own works on the computer screen is one merit of using a web page for a writing class. They have to read their works at least one more time when they rewrite them according to the teacher's corrections and editing. They cannot throw away their works after they have been corrected. In a sense they can put their works in a file called web pages.

It should be individual and bilateral work between the learner and the teacher, which is also a time and energy consuming process. But it is rewarding and worthwhile for both.

V. The New Web Maker

The New Web Maker is a system with which many users can send their files easily using a file transfer function on the Web, thus helping them make their home pages with ease. All kinds of files such as text files, images, and sounds, etc. can be sent easily from a browser on the Web. Traditionally, files have been transferred through FTP or other tools, but sending them on a browser is much simpler, which is good news for the novice as well as for the experienced.

File transfers on the Web are often used for downloading application software placed on

web pages. This is a function to transfer files in the server to the users' computers. The reverse function, which is to send files from the users' computers to the server, does not apply for some browsers of old version. (For example, versions before Internet Explorer 3.X do not have this function.)

On the new program, the server receives the files sent by the users, and then puts them up on the Web. In order for this to be done, received files should be classified according to the users and kept in their own directories. These directories are automatically made by the program.

Whenever a file tries to come into the server, it is checked against the list of the users who are registered. This procedure prevents the use of the server by unregistered people. How is this checking done?

First, the server sends the registration page to a user's computer, and the user inputs his ID and password and clicks on the transfer button on his computer screen. This information is sent to the server, and the CGI checks the ID and password of the user. If the information is correct, the second procedure will be done on the server. If not, the user repeats the initial procedure.

In the second procedure, the user can send files to the server or he can delete them. In order to send files, the user select one file in his computer. Then the user clicks on the transfer button and the file is automatically sent. When the transfer button is clicked on, the CGI for transferring is executed. This CGI keeps the received data as a file, but unnecessary information in the file is automatically removed by the program.

How can files in the server be deleted? A list of all the files sent by a user is shown on a pull-down menu. The user chooses a file he/she wants to delete and clicks on the delete button. In this procedure, a chosen file is sent to the server, and the CGI for the deletion is executed. The program was installed on a new Unix server purchased for this research by the same grant.⁷⁾ Kobayashi's class in 1999 used the system and the log recorded 1973 times of access to the server. (see Appendix.)

VI. Conclusion

The home page exchange in writing class is effective in several ways: giving students genuine opportunities to write, expanding readership, motivating students to write good

7) <http://noby.rikkyo.ac.jp/noby>

compositions qualitatively as well as quantitatively, and developing friendship, which may keep them writing each other even after their official courses are over. There is, naturally, room to improve the home page exchange. It is vital that home pages have enough information and that each student has his partner through match-making by the teachers or by the students themselves. Students are also encouraged to give feedback to the written comments from their partners, which give students opportunities to write more.

We have shown that there are now two ways of sending files to the server: (1) by sending them by email and (2) by sending them on the Web. Instructors who are interested in having their students make their own home pages can select one of the two systems depending on the computer environment they are in.

Kobayashi's and Hayase's students have been engaged in the homepage exchange project for the last three years. Now we would like to invite instructors all over the world to use our systems and our server. We are delighted to work with you in helping our students to meet, exchange home pages and develop friendship.⁸⁾

Bibliography

Doi, T. 1995. Task-based language teaching (TBLT) In K. Tazaki (Ed.),

Eigo kyojuho soran (An Anthology of English teaching methodologies). Tokyo: Taishukan.

Nunan, D. 1989. Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Appendix

The Log of WebMaker (The New System) from April to July in the spring semester in 1999.

(1) File Size Number of files sent to the server

0-1000	1045
1000-2000	539
2000-4000	205
4000-8000	78
8000-16000	61
16000-32000	19
32000 or over	26

8) Contact Etsuo KOBAYASHI (kobayasi@rikkyo.ac.jp)

Total numbers of access----- 1973 times of access

(2) Time zones when the System was used The number of users

0:00-3:00	6
3:00-6:00	26
6:00-9:00	2
9:00-12:00	549
12:00-15:00	364
15:00-18:00	408
18:00-21:00	550
21:00-24:00	68
Total	1973

(3) Individual users Number of Files sent to the system

96A02	9
97A03	92
97A14	153
97A15	201
97D03	103
97E12	76
98A10	21
98A14	26
98A16	148
98A00	14
98A04	177
98A37	80
98B26	322
98D08	174
98D01	2
98D02	9
98D09	67
98D15	31
99A00	5
99D06	119

99E01	137
99E04	3
99E07	2
kobayasi	2
Total	1973

Cf. 11 out of 30 students in this class survived. (<http://koby.rikkyo.ac.jp/comp98/comp98.html>)