

## Second Life

Title:	Second Life	
Publisher:	Linden Research Inc.	
Homepage:	<a href="http://secondlife.com">http://secondlife.com</a>	
Product:	type 3-D virtual world	
Platform:	Mac OS, Linux, and Windows	
Minimum system requirements:	<b>Windows:</b> 2000, 800 MHz Pentium III, 512 MB, NVIDIA GeForce, 1024x768 screen resolution <b>Mac OS:</b> Mac OS X 10.3.9, 1 GHz G4, 512 MB, ATI Radeon 9200, 1024x768 screen resolution <b>Linux:</b> reasonably modern 32-bit Linux, 800 MHz Pentium III, 512MB, NVIDIA GeForce 2, 1024x768 screen resolution Cable or DSL	
Price :	Free for a basic account; U\$9.95/month for an additional basic account or a premium account	

### Introduction

We live in a world that is becoming more networked every day, and the internet has grown into an essential medium for communication, socialization, and creative expression. Virtual worlds like Second Life represent the future of human interaction in a globally networked world, and students who have grown up with the Internet naturally swim in these waters. (Rymaszewski, Au, Wallace, Winters, Ondrejka, Batston-Cunningham, 2007, p. 318)

Although reactions toward the benefits of using virtual worlds for educational purposes vary (Stevens, 2006), it has been acknowledged that today's students have different abilities and expectations compared to the learners of just a few years ago (Prensky, 2001). Prensky calls these students native speakers of the digital world, a world that presents challenges for teachers educated in a less technologically-oriented era. However, these changes cannot be disregarded in favor of the more comfortable chalk and board lesson. Thus, understanding how to use new technologies to enhance learning is necessary to ensure these new learners' needs are being met. Virtual worlds like Second Life (SL) offer learners opportunities to collaborate, explore, and interact. Even though SL was not specifically designed for educational purposes, its educational benefits have been investigated and tested in the classroom, while anecdotal accounts of successful uses of SL have been published online in Blogs and Wikis and discussed at conferences. In spite of what sounds like positive feedback that attests to SL's potential as an educational tool, concerns have also been pointed out. This review aims at describing SL's main features and discussing affordances and constraints that should be taken into consideration for the adaptation and implementation of SL in the language classroom.

### General Description

Second Life is a 3D virtual world created by Linden Labs and designed by its own residents. It is most frequently used for socialization and interaction among users who come from different backgrounds and represent a range of ages—it should be noted that teenagers are not allowed in SL's main grid. The first step to starting your second life is to download the proprietary software available at the SL website [<http://www.secondlife.com>] and create an account (see Figure 1). There are three types of accounts: basic, additional basic, and premium. Users do not pay to have a basic account, but they pay a fee to create additional basic or premium accounts. The main difference among these accounts is the fact that only premium account members are allowed to own land; it is important to note that land also incurs fees that vary according to the size of the land one wishes to purchase. However, with a basic account the user will be able to explore most of what SL has to offer; should one really want to have their SL place, renting is available at different rates.

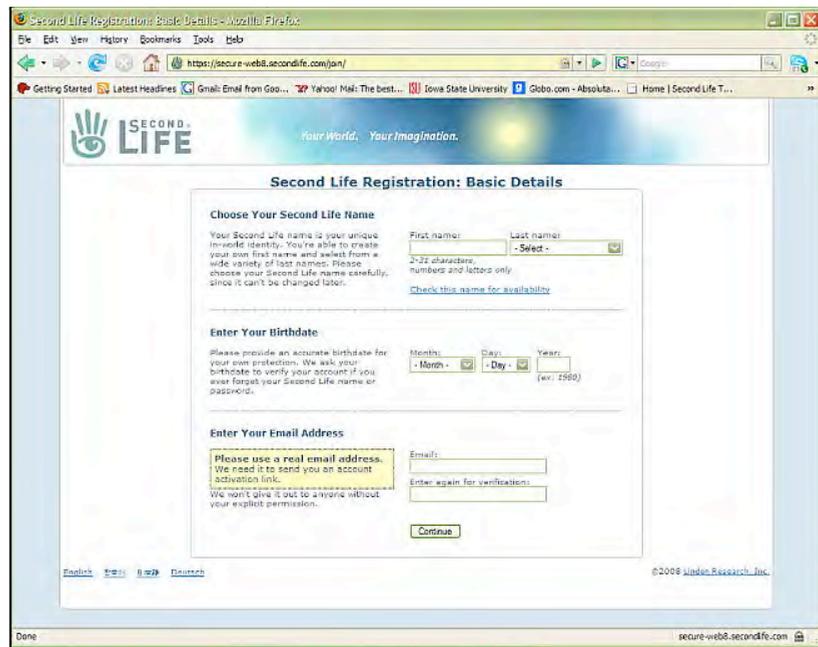


Figure 1. Login page

SL members use avatars to move around. Avatars are virtual representations of the users (see Figure 2). The sense of telepresence obtained by having an avatar is considered to be one of the benefits of SL for education (Dudeny & Hockly, 2006; Lee, Ahn, Kim, & Lim, 2007; Morton & Jack, 2005; Peterson, 2006). When registering, the user chooses a name, and later s/he is allowed to personalize the avatar; that is, they can make the avatar look like whatever they want, even vampires or furry animals. This personalization can be made through changes in the avatar's body and face, different choices of clothes, and use of a variety of gestures. Changing the avatar's appearance might look easy at a first glance, but can be cumbersome depending on how many details the user wants to work on (see Figure 3). Nonetheless, if this is something the user is really interested in, it is possible to get very detailed suggestions on how to do it (e.g., Rymaszewski, Au, Wallace, Winters, Ondrejka, Batstone-Cunningham, 2007).



Figure 2. The avatar

Besides the many options available for the personalization of the avatar, SL offers a wide variety of choices, from things to do and see to ways to get to different places and meet people. Moving around takes some practice if you choose to walk. Perhaps this is the reason why many users opt to fly. Knowing the destination's address or the name of the place one is aiming at, teleporting is the simplest way to go. If these are not known, it is also possible to search for this information and, once the location is found, create landmarks in order to be able to return more easily. After getting to the desired place, users can take snapshots, buy and sell things as well as interact with other users wherever they go. Objects are bought and sold in SL's currency, Linden dollars, which can be purchased on the SL website. However, many SL objects are free. Likewise, there are several choices for interacting with people in SL: users can send instant messages, text chat, or use the voice chat. It is also possible to join groups of people already in SL and offer friendship to other SL users. Friends can see each other when they are online and offer to teleport somebody to their location, which can be a useful feature for teachers to gather students in one place as they log on. Teachers have the option of creating a group and choosing the same last name for everybody; this allows for a little more control and the convenience of messaging the whole group at once (Bixler, 2007; Concklin, 2007). Figure 4 shows examples of places in SL users can choose to visit.



Figure 3. Changing the avatar's appearance and clothes



Figure 4. Places in SL: From left to right the Statue of Liberty, Elf Haven, Paris

While exploring the virtual world, users can interact with the environment by clicking on, moving or picking up objects and receiving information from them. For instance, users can click on objects and start a video clip, or they can be directed to a website. Similarly, SL objects can be programmed in such a way that, when a user gets close, it offers a notecard with information about the object itself or the place. Figure 5 shows an example of a notecard I was offered upon my arrival at the RMS Titanic site. Notecards are not only a good way to collect and store information in the avatar's inventory for future reference, but also good tools for information exchange.

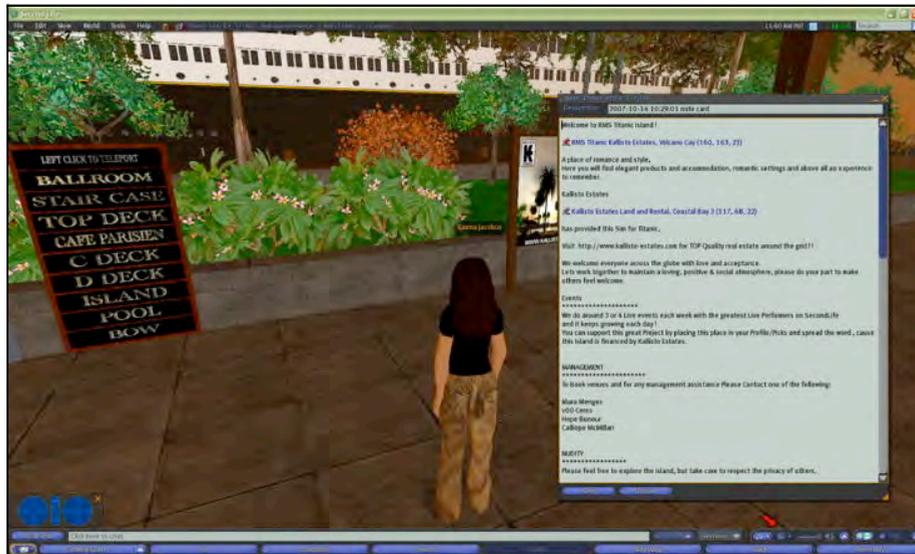


Figure 5. Notecard

All these possibilities may present a steep learning curve for teachers and students depending on their desire or need to explore SL. Whereas some menus and buttons might be straightforward for some people, they might take a little getting used to for others. Figure 6 displays the interface of SL. The buttons on the top of the screen show some options such as Help, Search, and Tools that might be familiar to most users. The options under the World tab are not as common in other software; some of these allow users to, for example, choose to make changes to the world such as "forcing sun" to ensure perpetual daylight. The users can also see the current time in SL as well as the amount of Linden dollars they own. The square window on the right of the avatar shows the user's inventory, which is a collection of all the objects, notecards, landmarks, etc., that the user gathers while in SL. The pie menu, seen on the lower left next to the avatar in Figure 6, is made available when the user right clicks on something. This menu shows options available for the particular area or object, such as Buy, Create, or Sit. The little square menu in the bottom left corner is the camera view controls. These are quite helpful when taking snapshots or changing appearance. Finally, the buttons across the bottom of the screen show the most frequently utilized SL functions, namely communicating, flying, taking snapshots, consulting the map, and checking the inventory. The controls for the voice chat and the field for the text chat are also located there.



**Figure 6.** Second Life interface

Once the user becomes more acquainted with SL, s/he might want to try building, scripting, or creating. Building is not very complicated, especially if the goal is not something as detailed as a sports car. Everything starts with a "primitive"—i.e., SL's basic geometric figure—which is later changed to whatever the creator wants. It is possible to change the spatial location of an object, its color and texture, and even to link two or more primitives together to create other more elaborate objects such as houses (see Figure 7). Once objects are created, it is possible to add a script to give the object a function such as uttering a message when a user approaches, making some kind of movement, or showing up a video or website when the user clicks on it. Another activity, creating machinimas, is perhaps one of the most challenging activities in SL. Machinimas are movies created in-world; however, creators of machinimas sometimes use other software for their creation in order to capture the on-screen movement of the avatar, edit and join the resulting clips. Examples of SL machinimas can be found by searching YouTube for the term.



Figure 7. Creating objects

## Evaluation

Among the advantages of SL for educational purposes, experiential learning, collaboration, social construction of knowledge, and role playing, have been highlighted (Antonacci & Modares, 2005; Arreguin, 2007; Bixler, 2007; Boettcher, 2005; Fetscherin & Lattemann, 2007; Stevens, 2006). Learners can work together with other learners as well as with native speakers of the target language; they can collaborate to create objects; they can role play situations such as ordering food at a restaurant; and they can also participate in scavenger hunts and guided tours. These in-world experiences can be shared in the language classroom via presentations and essays. Second Life tasks can and should be adapted to allow for this transfer of knowledge.

Second Life tools can be used to enhance learners' language experience in-world. For example, notecards and videos can be created or adapted to different languages. Voice and text chatting can also provide learners with opportunities to use authentic language. The avatar can encourage speaking and writing activities, from a simple description of what the avatar looks like to a more complex discussion of the avatar as the virtual representation of a person. Areas in SL can be created to simulate real life situations—e.g., restaurants, banks, etc. These could be ideal places for role playing and use of the target language structures. Notwithstanding, these potential activities need to be planned with caution, and drawbacks should be carefully considered.

As with any other new technology, Second Life has its constraints. First and foremost, getting used to SL may involve a steep learning curve for both teachers and students. Teachers have to allow themselves enough time to get acquainted with the world (Arreguin, 2007) and to provide students with tutorials on how to get started and do the tasks in SL. Another potential barrier is the fairly high technical requirements (Antonacci & Modares, 2005; Conklin, 2007), which might prevent some teachers and students from getting access to it. It is important to keep in mind that some materials—for example, PowerPoint presentations—might not be as easily uploaded in SL as in other educational tools. Maintenance downtimes should also be expected from time to time. Also, while in-world, students might be subjected to mature unwanted situations known as griefing (i.e., harassment), which could be perceived as a problem. These issues should be mentioned in the initial orientation to SL to prevent them from affecting students' enthusiasm. Another solution to this problem is to use areas where such problems are less likely to occur. For instance, some universities own private islands that might be a better option for class meetings because their access is usually controlled. The teacher can also ask the students to set home at this private island so that they can easily teleport whenever they feel uncomfortable in any SL place (Conklin, 2007). Finally, it is worth mentioning that learners using SL will need frequent guidance. Well-planned and clear tasks might ensure they do not get lost or frustrated. Pedagogical goals should also be kept in mind to allow for the most productive and enjoyable in-world experience.

Nonetheless, teachers should not be discouraged to use SL. A large community of educators and researchers is committed to learning about SL and sharing concerns and suggestions. Information about SL is available in several different mediums such as Blogs, Wikis, and YouTube videos (references to some of these resources are available below). Another good source of information about current uses of SL for education is the Second Life Educators List (SLED). Moreover, Linden Labs tries to stimulate educators by providing in-world support as well as by giving them a one-time opportunity to own a piece of land and try SL out with their students for the duration of a class (Cohen, 2006; Stevens, 2006). Lastly, several guide books released in 2007 contain useful information for those who want to know more about SL.

## Conclusion

In sum, Second Life, although not specifically designed for language learning, has the potential to provide teachers and students with worthy learning experiences. The exploration of SL's possibilities is ongoing and seems to be increasing. More and more professionals in the field are engaged in discovering how to best adapt the features present in SL to their language classrooms. Used with consideration and careful preparation, SL can be a strong asset to the language classroom.

## Some Second Life Resources

Second Life Educators list (SLED):

<https://lists.secondlife.com/cgi-bin/mailman/listinfo/educators>

Second Life Education Wiki:

[http://www.simteach.com/wiki/index.php?title=Second\\_Life\\_Education\\_Wiki](http://www.simteach.com/wiki/index.php?title=Second_Life_Education_Wiki)

Annotated Bibliography of Second Life Educational Online Resources:

<http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~mpepper/slib>

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## About the Reviewer

**Karina Silva** is a doctoral student in the Applied Linguistics and Technology Program at Iowa State University. She holds an MA in TESL/Applied Linguistics from Ohio University. She has taught EFL classes in Brazil as well as first-year composition and ESL classes at Iowa State University. Karina has also co-authored a series of books for elementary school children and presented at conferences in Brazil and the United States. Her research interests include CALL, materials design and teacher education. She is currently focusing on investigating the use of Second Life for language teaching.

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