

# Cyberspace Cows

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## Introduction

This article briefly discusses current methods in language teaching and how they merge with simulation, the internet, and MOO's (Multi-User Domain Object Oriented). Little research has been published on MOO's in language teaching. One MOO, schMOOze University, offers learners the chance to communicate in English with hundreds of people from around the world in a unique environment developed especially for them—and they never have to leave the classroom. Suggestions for teachers getting started at schMOOze University are given.

In English-speaking countries, ESL (English as a Second Language) students have a variety of communication opportunities; but in countries like Japan, EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students have fewer opportunities to communicate in English. Teachers can, however, expand opportunities for their students to communicate via technology. Although much has been written about teaching with music (Murphey, 1992), videos (Cooper, Lavery, & Rinvoluceri, 1991), and computers (Hardisty & Windeatt, 1989), little has been written about MOO's (Multi-User Domain Oriented Objects). Teaching language via MOO's has evolved from language teaching merging with simulations and the internet.

Early language teaching methods, such as the Grammar Translation Method, Direct Method, and Audiolingual Method, focused on teachers and language rather than learners and communication. More recent approaches, such as the Community Language Learning, and Communicative Language Teaching, place more emphasis on learners and communication (see Larsen-Freeman, 1986, for more discussion on teaching methods). In these newer approaches, teachers often attempt to simulate real communication for their students.

Much has been written on simulations for TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) in the form of simulations (Jones, 1982), role-playing (Porter-Ladousse, 1987), communicative activities (Klippel, 1984; Templin, 1997), and Cyberspace Cows drama (Maley & Duff, 1982; Wessels, 1987). These simulations promote authentic communication in a safe environment where learners do not have to travel to an English speaking country (Crookall, Oxford, Saunders, & Lavine, 1990). In simulations, learners frequently use all the parts of language competence: grammar,

discourse, sociolinguistic knowledge, and strategies (Canale, 1983). Students can feel free to make mistakes without the embarrassment and other negative consequences that occur in real situations. It can be argued that simulations are not realistic enough, but they can provide a smooth transition for learners from no communication to real communication. In addition, they provide an alternative when it is not feasible for a teacher to take every student to an English-speaking country, or context.

Rather than only communicating with classmates (who can already communicate with each other in EFL situations using their first language), learners can communicate with others (keypals) from around the world via the internet (for more on the internet, see Kluge, 1996, 1997; McGuire, 1996, 1997; Newfields, 1996; 1997; Newfields & McGuire, 1997; Warschauer & Whittaker, 1997). MOO's (Multi-User Domain Object Oriented) furnish an environment where learners can interact with hundreds of others. One of the most extensive MOO's for TESOL is schMOOze University.

### **schMOOze University**

Julie Falsetti, ESL author and instructor, and Eric Schweitzer, computer science instructor (both at Hunter College, City University of New York) founded schMOOze University for EFL/ESL learners and those interested in cross-cultural communication in July, 1994 (Guest, 1995). At schMOOze University, people can hang out anywhere on campus and talk to others, read at the library, play language games in the game room, go on a treasure hunt, or sing karaoke at MOOrey's bar (but don't get too rowdy or Kumiko the bouncer will throw you out).

### **Connecting**

To connect, telnet to schMOOze at <schmooze.hunter.cuny.edu 8888>. Be sure to leave a space between "edu" and "8888". You should see instructions directing you to connect to schMOOze. Follow the instructions (type "connect guest"). The prompt will ask you for a name to use while you are visiting. Most people use fictional names instead of their real names (some actually disclose their real names to meet each other in real life—IRL). Next, you will be asked to describe yourself: you could be a one-eyed-one-eared-flying-purple-people-eater, a polar bear, or anything you can imagine.

After describing yourself, you should find yourself at the entrance to the university. You cannot actually see the carved stone archway of the campus; everything at schMOOze University is typed in text. Over 70,000 guests have visited schMOOze University and there are hundreds of regular players. Some of the regular players include Mehitabel, a cool cat (Julie Falsetti); Archy, a cockroach (Eric Schweitzer); Pozzo, a plump, bald man (Michael Guest); Rat, a human-sized rat (me); and iGoR, a

green hunchback. To become a regular player, send e-mail to <jfalsett@shiva.hunter.cuny.edu.>. Include your real name and the name of the character you want to be. Your character will be added to schMOOze University, and you should receive a password by e-mail within 24 hours.

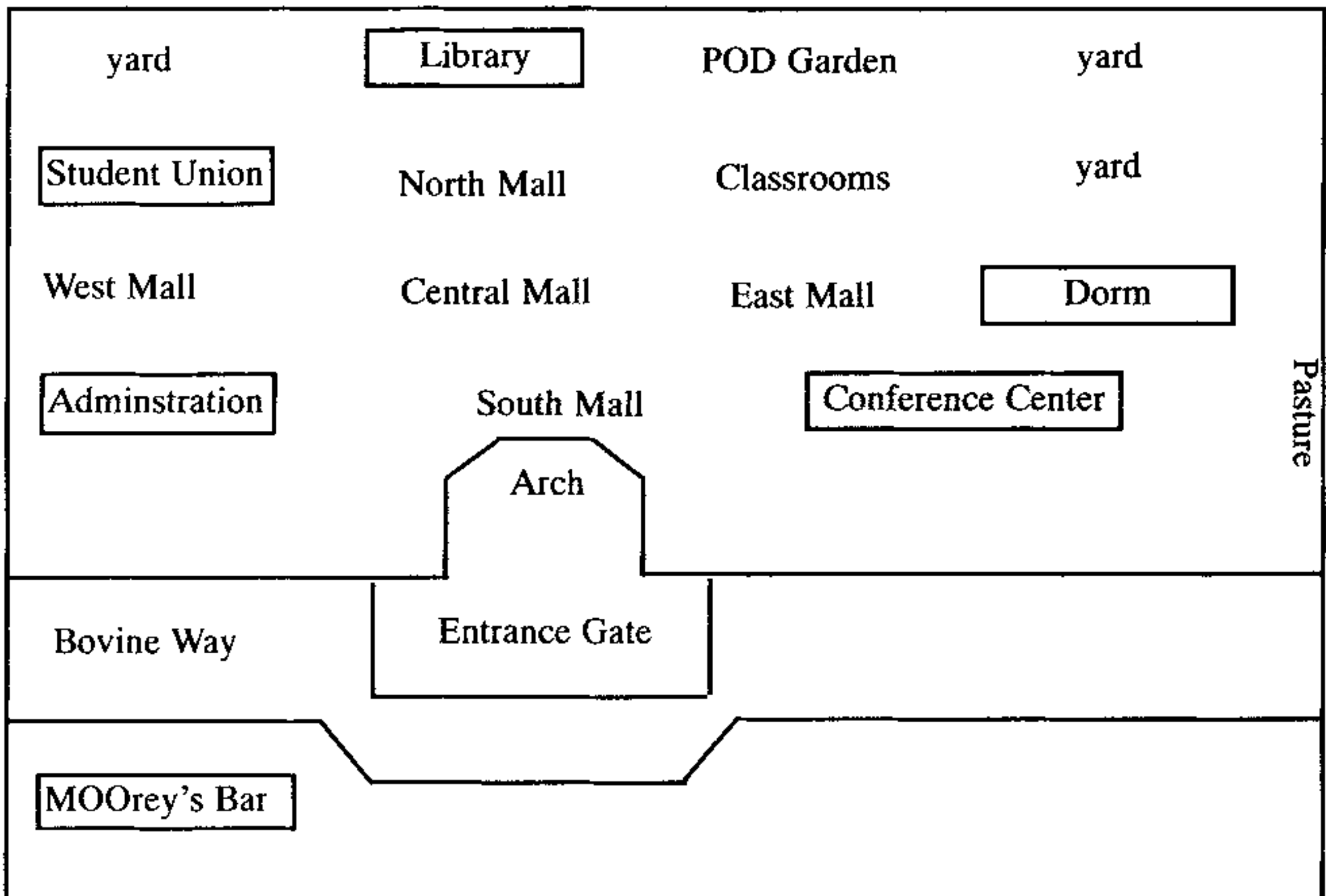
**Orientation**

To orient yourself with the campus, it is important to know good manners and to use a map. SchMOOze manners can be summarized:

- 1) Only use English.
- 2) Respect others.
- 3) Do not log conversations.

To see a map of schMOOze University, type "map". Figure 1 shows the map.

**Figure 1**  
**Map of schMOOze University**



If you become a regular player, you can get a room at the Dorm, also called the Campus University Dorm(CUD). In the Student Union Building (SUB), you can eat some pizza at the cafeteria, tag a message on a wall in the graffiti room, or play games in the game room: Hangman, Boggle, Scrabble, Jotto, Word Yahtzee, Towers of Hanoi, Hearts, and others. You can find out more about schMOOze or an infinite number of other topics in the library and while you are there, you might want to experience some *haiku* written by the resident poet. The basement in the Administration Building connects to the underground level of schMOOze University via a grammar maze.

## Getting Around

To save time in figuring out how to get around campus, from the entrance gates, type “classroom”. You will be teleported to the Classrooms building, Lecture and Classroom Training Orientation Site (LACTOS), and Guest 101, where you can learn about schMOOze commands. Commands consist of the following syntax:

- 1) verb
- 2) verb + direct object
- 3) verb + direct object + preposition + indirect object

Table I gives a list of beginning commands.

**Table 1**

### Basic schMOOze Commands

<b>Movement</b> (type these commands)	<b>Result</b> (what happens)
I	look at room person, or object
I <object>	look at object or player
<type first letter of exit description>	move
knock <player>	ask permission to teleport to someone's location, and wait for their response.
@join<player>	teleport to player's location
home	return to entrance gates
Speaking	
“<message>	speak to other players in the room
:<message>	nonverbal communication with others in room
@who	find out who is at SchMOOze & where

page<player><message>

page a player currently at schMOOze

## Manipulation

get

pick up object and put in your inventory

i

inventory what you carry

drop

remove object from your inventory and place in room

put

take an object from your inventory and place in a container

give

hand an object to another player

## Help

help

get help/command topics

help <topic>

introduction

@quit

quit schMOOze

Note: Do not type<>, only type the information inside.

The left column indicates what you type and the right column indicates what happens as a result of your typing. The movement commands are usually easy; however, sometimes moving through exits is not so easy—you may have to type one word of the description or the full description of an exit. Also, remember to “knock” before joining someone, out of respect for others. If you have problems, you can type: help <topic>. You can also go back to the classroom for a review or ask other players for help.

After becoming a regular player (explained at the end of “Connecting,” above), you will want to learn more commands in the Classrooms at Players 151. Table 2 summarizes player commands.

## Table 2

### Player Commands

#### Speaking

whisper “<message>” to <player>

#### Result

speak privately to someone in the same room

**Mail**

@mail	list of mail received
@read<number>	read letter of that number
@next	shows next letter in list
@answer	reply to letter you are reading
@rmmail <number>	deletes letter of that number
@send <player>	Enter subject, begin each line of message with “, and type “send”

**Descriptions**

@password <old password> <new password>	change password
@describe <object> as <description>	describe “me”, “here”, or object you own
@gender <gender>	set your gender

**Help**

help index	index of commands
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“Whisper” allows you to speak to one person, without others in the room being able to read what you said. Use the mail commands to send mail to others who may not be online when you are.

**Teaching Preparation**

- 1) Familiarize yourself with schMOOze University, and find out what it offers.
- 2) Decide whether or not schMOOze University fits in with the needs of your institution, students, and you.
- 3) Make sure your school has the necessary computers and telnet capabilities available at the time your class will meet. Decide whether you will use telnet by itself or with additional software.
- 4) Find out how familiar your students are with computers, how much time they will need to use schMOOze, and if the time invested will be worth it.
- 5) Set the goal you expect your students to achieve (this will depend largely on your curriculum). Break the goal into clear objectives. Define the objectives into specific, challenging tasks (not overly difficult, especially in the beginning).

6) Prepare a backup plan for when technical difficulties arise. A computer specialist should be on hand, if available.

7) Tell your students why you want them to use schMOOze, give a general introduction to schMOOze, explain basic netiquette, show students how to connect to schMOOze, give them a map and basic commands, and discuss any questions they have before giving them their assignments and actually connecting.

### **Difficulties: Lagging & Raw Telnet**

#### **Lagging**

After you, or others, type a command, schMOOze University's computer may lag—just try to be patient when things become slow.

#### **Raw Telnet**

When you communicate with others, if you only use raw telnet, other messages will mix in with what you are trying to type. This can make understanding and typing more difficult.

To prevent this you can use visual client software to split your screen in half. What everyone else types will be in the top screen, and what you type will be on the bottom screen. This should enhance your MOOing experience at schMOOze University.

To find out more about visual clients for your particular situation, visit the resource room in the Library, go to Players 151 in the classrooms (if you are a player), or check out schMOOze's web page at <http://schmooze.hunger.cuny.edu:8888//>.

### **Conclusion**

Exploring MOO's launches teachers and students to the cutting edge of language learning in cyberspace, giving students the opportunity to really communicate with others in English. Informed with the basic knowledge (language teaching, simulations, the internet, MOO's, and a place like schMOOze University) contained in this article, teachers can prepare themselves to pioneer an exciting frontier in language teaching.

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*Stephen A. Templin (steve@ics.meio-u.ac.jp) recently began teaching EFL at Meio University in Okinawa. His articles have appeared in various publications, including JALT Journal and The Language Teacher. He recently authored the teacher's handbook, Communicative Tool Box for Japanese Students and did research for the Kanagawa Board of Education.*

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