Gong – A Free Web Voice Tool for Language Learners

The Gong system is a web-based voice tool developed by the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology which is used by thousands of people around the world. The software can be downloaded free at http://gong.ust.hk. At a basic level of operation, it allows people to communicate using text and voice over the Internet. People such as students and teachers can participate in different discussion boards in the system. Inside these boards they can leave text and voice messages and they can also listen to and reply to messages from other people on the boards. In addition, groups of participants can talk to each other using real-time text and voice chat. The whole or part of the chat conversation can be recorded, which means others can listen to or reply to the conversation after the chat is finished.

The system offers great assistance to language learners with its advanced features such as selective word/phrase playback, voice speed-up and voice slow-down. Given an English voice message and its transcript, the system allows people to play a single word or a phrase by simply selecting the word(s). The speed of the voice playback can be adjusted based on a words-per-minute measure. Language learners can evaluate their own listening comprehension by changing the number of words spoken per minute.

Apart from English the system also supports the input, display and storage of various languages such as Traditional and Simplified Chinese, Japanese and more. Different languages can be shown alongside each other in the same text message. In addition, the system supports the Chinese Mandarin Pinyin and Chinese Cantonese Yale romanization systems. People can easily insert one of these two romanized forms of Chinese words within any text message.

The Gong software has been installed and used by students and teachers at several education institutions including the author's home institute, distance learning institutions and secondary schools.