SpellCheckPlus

Reviewed by

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PRODUCT AT A GLANCE

Product Type:
Online spelling and grammar checker

Language:
English as a Second Language

Level:
From the novice to the expert; both ESL learners and English speakers

Media Format:
Web-based tool

Operating Systems:
Any computer connected to the internet

Documentation:
None

Price:
$14.99 a year for individuals; $149 for a classroom of up to 30 students
Discounts are available for group, academic and institutional licenses
Free trial is provided. (No charges for using a trial Pro version up to 5 days.)

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

SpellCheckPlus is a web-based grammar and spelling checker that allows English learners to verify spelling and grammar errors in their writing. SpellCheckPlus is extremely easy to use because it does not require users to have any special computer skills.

Learners are able to check English grammar and spelling by simply typing or pasting the original text and then clicking the “Check Text” button on the screen. When learners click on the “Check Text” button, SpellCheckPlus automatically analyzes the essay and displays the errors that are generally categorized into two different types. For example, ‘Spelling errors’ are marked in red and ‘Grammar errors’ are surrounded by yellow lines. However, it does not mean that the software automatically revises all errors; rather, it offers opportunities for learners to repair the errors by themselves because it only highlights the errors. Not only does it automatically detect the errors that learners make, but SpellCheckPlus also provides them with additional grammar explanations and exercises focusing on the errors.
SpellCheckPlus was developed to help English language learners find and correct errors while reading the explanation and exercises about them. Furthermore, SpellCheckPlus is updated on a regular basis by the developers in order to detect the linguistic errors more precisely.

EVALUATION

Technological Features

SpellCheckPlus is an online English Grammar check software that learners are able to access easily. For evaluation purposes, SpellCheckPlus was tested on a laptop with Windows 7. As long as learners are connected to the internet, they are able to use the software regardless of time and place. No software installation is required, nor will the software use hard drive space on a learner’s computer. In addition, users can take advantage of the full screen editor function in any web browser (e.g., Microsoft Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, etc.), excluding Safari.

Before purchasing the Pro version of SpellCheckPlus, users are able to practice with a trial version of the software that allows them up to 5 days of use at no charge. After the free trial period, the learners are required to purchase the official software license that costs only $15 per year. While the trial version allows learners to submit up to 500 words of text, the official version has no word limit. Additionally, the Pro version eliminates advertisements on the edit screen and archives writing that users can save for later reference.

Activities (Procedure)

After registering at the website, learners are able to log into the server with their own identification names and passwords. After logging in, learners will see the editing web page (see Figure 1). To submit a text, learners can simply type or copy and paste the text into the main screen.

Figure 1
Basic Editing Screen
After submitting the text, learners can click on the “Check Text” button on the right side, and the software automatically detects and marks possible errors in the text.

Figure 2 below shows sample sentences that SpellCheckPlus analyzed. As shown in the main screen, the errors are categorized into two types. The errors marked in red indicate spelling errors, and the parts highlighted in yellow represent grammatical errors.

Feature 1: types of errors that SpellCheckPlus can detect. SpellCheckPlus is able to detect two types of errors, but it does not automatically correct the errors; it merely draws users’ attention to them. When users move the cursor over a marked error, the explanation for correcting the error is displayed at the top-right corner of the window (see Figure 2 above).

Feature 2: vocabulary enrichment. SpellCheckPlus helps users to learn and use synonyms for the target words through ‘vocabulary enrichment tools.’ By typing a word in a text box, learners are able to find similar words, exposing them to more diverse vocabulary (see Figure 3).
Feature 3: further explanation. When the learners move their cursor over the marked texts, they also see the explanations of their errors as shown in the following:

**Spelling Errors**

**Punctuation:**

*without* This expression is usually written as one word, e.g.: without, boyfriend, straightforward, etc.

**Spelling error:**

*after* Spelling error - suggestions: after, adder, avider, aider, alder, ofter, AFT, aft, fade, afford, Ade, avert, Afr, afire, evader, afters, offer, offer, udder, arider, AFDC, Adar, Adey, Oder, afar, aide, aver, dafter, rafter, ardor, eider, order

**Capitalization:**

*saturday* Days of the week should begin with a capital letter, e.g. Monday.

**Grammar:**

*had went* You should use the form gone after have, e.g., She has gone.
*too go* You should write *to* before verbs, nouns and pronouns, e.g.: *I like to swim,* *He gave it to me* (the word *too* means “excessive”).

Feature 4: grammar exercises. A remarkable characteristic of *SpellCheckPlus* is that learners can understand why they made certain grammatical errors in their writing. If learners click on ‘Grammar exercises’ next to their errors (see Figure 4), the follow-up grammar exercises explain to learners how they can solve future grammatical errors and consequently improve their grammatical knowledge.
**Teacher Fit (Approaches)**

According to the software developers, *SpellCheckPlus* is inspired by a process-writing approach because it is designed to help learners to understand each step of the writing process as a learning procedure in order to enhance their writing skills. A process-writing approach in written instruction focuses on helping learners understand and develop their own writing process based on the feedback from teachers and peers throughout the writing process (Brown, 2007). *SpellCheckPlus* also allows learners to learn from the revision process because it points out each error one by one. Additionally, it helps learners to improve their writing by reading the summary of the errors and doing grammar exercises, if necessary.

*SpellCheckPlus* is also based on the learner-centered approach. As opposed to a traditional teacher-centered learning approach in which learners usually rely on teachers, a learner-centered approach focuses on encouraging learners to be more independent in their learning process by understanding their needs, styles, and learning purposes (Brown, 2007). In this respect, *SpellCheckPlus* includes various methods to encourage learners to enhance their language skills through independent types of learning. For example, although *SpellCheckPlus* analyzes and detects errors, it does not automatically correct these errors. Rather, it lets the learners decide if changes are necessary, allowing them to take responsibility for changing their essays. In addition to revising their essays, the learners are also able to repeat grammar exercises until they fully understand how to use the grammatical structures within context. They can review their previous essays in the ‘My Archives’ section where submitted texts are automatically saved. The software allows learners to control and to become more independent language learners who are capable of using the target language confidently.

Moreover, *SpellCheckPlus* is a useful tool to teach grammar in communicative ways. From the perspective of communicative language teaching, “the essential conditions for acquisition of grammatical forms are (1) learner noticing and continued awareness of target forms, (2) repeated meaning-focused exposure to input containing them, and (3) opportunities for output and practice” (Nassaji & Fotos, 2004, p.137). Also, the ideal success of the grammar class is “in the improvement of students’ performance outside of grammar class, not in the grammar learning itself” (Brown, 2007, p. 425). In *SpellCheckPlus*, learners are able to use their own essays as effective contexts to learn grammar. Since learners check grammar and spelling errors in order to improve their writing, they can be more engaged to find errors and to learn how to use the target grammar in the contexts more appropriately.
**Learner Fit**

*SpellCheckPlus* is intended for both native and nonnative speakers of English at any level of language learning and speaking.

The representative strength of *SpellCheckPlus* is that it encourages learners to be independent throughout the writing process and completion of the embedded grammar instruction. Since it does not directly display the grammar and spelling corrections to learners, they have opportunities to consider what to revise and how to change the detected errors while reading the explanation. Furthermore, the follow-up grammar exercises help learners to practice problematic grammar points until they understand the appropriate use of those points. Overall, *SpellCheckPlus* provides learners with meaningful and effective grammar instruction and feedback to improve their writing.

Additionally, *SpellCheckPlus* is distinguished from other spell check programs in terms of the function that helps students to correct various errors when they change from spoken English to written English. For example, a student might make mistakes by writing ‘self a steam’ instead ‘self esteem’ because they just spell the word as it sounds in spoken English. *SpellCheckPlus* detects and corrects these errors produced by learners’ confusion between spoken and written English. Moreover, native speakers of English who have just entered public school also could benefit from the software in terms of using correct punctuation, spelling, and grammatical structures.

However, *Spell Check Plus* has some limitations. The developers of *SpellCheckPlus* point out that the software does not detect 100% of the errors in a text. Since the software mainly detects grammar and spelling errors, some level of linguistic accuracy is essential. However due to some limitations of the current technology, the software might not detect all errors perfectly. Therefore, the developers try to update the software continually in order to improve the detection of errors. Another limitation of *SpellCheckPlus* is that the grammar instruction does not explicitly explain complicated grammatical aspects but provides only a general grammar explanation. Finally, the software might not be useful for advanced learners who aim to check the overall quality of their essays, including content and cohesiveness, due to technical limitations.

**SUMMARY**

*SpellCheckPlus* is an online grammar and spelling checker that helps ESL learners improve their writing skills by detecting grammatical errors in their writing. The useful features of the software include functions such as a vocabulary enrichment tool, grammar explanations, and follow-up exercises intended to direct learners to improve their writing on their own. While revising the essays by reading and understanding the explanation, learners are able to enhance their general grammatical knowledge and to improve their writing skills. Although *SpellCheckPlus* is not able to detect 100% of grammar errors, it is still a useful learning tool that helps English learners to improve general grammatical knowledge and writing skills.


**SCALED RATING**

(1 low-5 high)

Implementation Possibilities: 4  
Pedagogical Features: 4  
Sociolinguistic Accuracy: 4  
Use of Computer Capabilities: 4.5  
Ease of Use (for both for students and teachers): 5  
Overall Evaluation: 4.5  
Value for Money: 4.5

**PRODUCER’S CONTACT INFORMATION**

Developer/distributor:  
Nadaclair Language Technologies, Dr. Terry Nadasdi and Dr. Stéfan Sinclair  
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**REFERENCES**


**REVIEWER’S BIODATA**

Hyejin Yang is a graduate student who received her MA in Teaching of English as a Second Language at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in May 2010. Her academic interests include computer-based language testing and computer-assisted language learning. She will begin her Ph.D. at Iowa State University in August 2010.

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