Use of Computer-Assisted Language Learning(CALL)

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Abstract

Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL) is based on the idea that learning language successfully comes through having to communicate real meaning. When learners are involved in real communication, their natural strategies for language acquisition will be used, and this will allow them to learn to use the language. To the next generation, the use of computers will be as familiar and easy as switching on a light or watching television. Computers have a very important role in language learning; for language is a means of communication and the use of a computer involves communication between the user and the machine.

Introduction:

The main aim of CALL is to find ways for using computers for the purpose of teaching and learning the language.No doubt, computers make excellent teaching tools, especially in teaching languages in any aspect, be it vocabulary, grammar, composition, pronunciation, or other linguistic and pragmatic-communicative skills. And the major benefits offered by computer in enhancing language acquisition apparently outweigh its limitations. Applying the theoretical perspective of the communicative approach, CALL aims broadly to make communicative competence the goal of language teaching. The goal of teachers who use CALL is to enable students to communicate in the target language. To do this students need knowledge of the linguistic forms, meanings and functions. They need to know that many different forms can be used to perform a functions and also that a single form can often serve a variety of functions. They must be able to choose from among these the most appropriate form, given the social context and the roles of the interlocutors. They must also be able to manage the process of negotiating meaning with their interlocutors. Moreover, CALL is the use of computer technologies that promote educational learning.It is often necessary, in a language learning classroom, to provide repeated practice to meet important objectives. Because this can be boring, painful, and frustrating, many students lose interest and motivation to learn foreign languages. CALL programmes present the learner with a novelty. They teach the language in different and more interesting, attractive ways and present language through games, animated graphics and problem-solving techniques. As a result even tedious drills become more interesting. In fact, CALL motivates the students to go beyond the point of initial mastery and practice activity until they become automatic.

Discussion:

The use of CALL is frequently seen as an effective tool to improve students' involvement. Additionally, it is usually seen as a way of improving students' performance, although as Liu et al. (2002) and Sagarra and Zapata (2008) showed, this is a more controversial matter, as different studies argue about the effectiveness of the use

of technology in language learning. Many institutions try to promote the use of CALL in their courses, up to the point that efficient technology is abandoned for a new one as the new one is seen as more innovative. Johnson et al. (2013) suggest that “any discussion of technology adoption must also consider important constraints and challenges”. However, many institutions try to envision the possible advantages of different software for their students and very rarely do they pay attention to the repercussion that this might have on teacher’s teaching, as highlighted by Hong (2010). This lack of consideration of the pressures put on teaching staff can be seen when we review the existing studies on the use of CALL. These investigations mainly deal with the effectiveness of CALL vs. traditional face-to-face teaching, and the attitudes of students towards technology in the language classroom. Some studies carried out in the 1960s and 1970s, such as Barrutia (1964, 1969 and 1970), or Gilman (1969), already showed a tendency to study the effectiveness of a certain CALL application in language teaching. This was also one of the main foci in the 1990s and in more recent years, as we can see in Blake (2000), Cahill and Catanzaro (1997), Chun (1994), Chun and Plass (1996), Davis and Lyman-Hager (1997), Derwing, Munro, and Carbonaro (2000),

The computer is a human made tool which is incapable of action. That is, it has no inborn wisdom, no initiative and inherent ability to learn or to teach. It will perform, with remarkable speed, the instructions exactly given to it by a human user. Thus, the computer is ‘the servant of the user’ and it should not be forgotten that its role in teaching is solely a teaching aid. Consequently, it is dependent on the teacher in many ways: for example, it is unable to create educational materials without the teacher. All the linguistic material and instructions for its presentation must be specified by the teacher. It is the teacher who decides what degree of control the computer will have in her/his classes. Hence, as Briefly & Kemble (1991) state there is no need for teachers to feel threatened to lose their professions to the computer. It is traditionally described as a means of 'presenting, reinforcing and testing' particular language items. The learner is first presented with a rule and some examples, and then answers a series of questions which test her/his knowledge of the rule and the computer gives appropriate feedback and awards a mark, which may be stored for later inspection for the teacher. Jones & Fortescue (1987) indicate that the traditional description of CALL is unfortunate and they present the computer as flexible classroom aid, which can be used by teachers and learners, in and out of class, in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes. However, work with the computer, as any other teaching aid, needs to be linked with ordinary classroom work and CALL lessons, like the other lessons, need to be planned carefully.

By using the computer, students are often able to use their Academic Learning Time (ALT) more fruitfully. Academic Learning Time (ALT) is the amount of time a student spends attending to relevant academic tasks while performing those tasks with a high rate of success. For example, not all the time officially scheduled for studying a foreign language is likely to be allocated to it. If an hour is assigned to working on a topic, but the teacher devotes five minutes at the beginning of the session to returning papers and five minutes at the end to reading announcements, then only fifty minutes have been allocated to working on the topic. Scheduled time merely sets an upper limit on allocated time. Likewise, allocated time merely sets the upper limit to engaged time, which refers to the amount of time students actively attend to the subject matter under consideration.

Even though fifty minutes may be allocated to studying a topic in French class, students may stare out the window or talk to their neighbours instead of pursuing the assigned activity. Therefore, even when they are actively engaged in studying the foreign language, students learn effectively only when they are performing at a high rate of success. This smaller amount of time is the factor that is most strongly related to the amount of learning that takes place (Lareau 1985:65-67). Computers enhance second/foreign language academic learning time by permitting learners to acquire specific information and practice specific skills and by helping students develop basic tools of learning which they can apply in a wide variety of settings. This also subverts the relationship between time and traditional instruction. Traditional instruction holds time constant and allows achievement to vary within a group. Computer-assisted learning reverses this relationship by holding achievement constant and letting the time students spend in pursuit of the objectives vary.

According to Underwood, communicative CALL:

- focuses more on using forms rather than on the forms themselves;
- teaches grammar implicitly rather than explicitly;
- allows and encourages students to generate original utterances rather than just manipulate prefabricated language;
- does not judge and evaluate everything the students nor reward them with congratulatory messages, lights, or bells;
- avoids telling students they are wrong and is flexible to a variety of student responses;
- uses the target language exclusively and creates an environment in which using the target language feels natural, both on and off the screen; and
- Will never try to do anything that a book can do just as well.

The history and development of modern computer technology has definitely established CALL as an effective and efficient tool in language learning. Call is firmly entrenched in today's language learning arena and will be for the foreseeable future. However, there are several cautions to be observed and it is important to remember CALL is not a one stop solution. As raised by Garrett, "the use of a computer does not constitute a method" but rather a "medium in which a variety of methods, approaches, and pedagogical philosophies may be implemented."There are a number of barriers to the use of CALL in language learning: financial, availability of hardware and software, technical knowledge and acceptance of technology. Institutions and students alike may have problems affording the equipment and programs to effectively use or implement CALL.

Steps toward integrative CALL: the Internet

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), which has existed in primitive form since the 1960s but has only became wide-spread in the last five years, is probably the single computer application to date with the greatest impact on language teaching. [**ICT4LT Editor's Note:** See Section 14, Module 1.5, for further information on CMC.] For the first time, language learners can communicate directly, inexpensively, and conveniently

with other learners or speakers of the target language 24 hours a day, from school, work, or home. This communication can be asynchronous (not simultaneous) through tools such as electronic mail (email), which allows each participant to compose messages at their time and pace, or in can be synchronous (synchronous, "real time"), using programs such as MOOs, which allow people all around the world to have a simultaneous conversation by typing at their keyboards. It also allows not only one-to-one communication, but also one-to-many, allowing a teacher or student to share a message with a small group, the whole class, a partner class, or an international discussion list of hundreds or thousands of people.

Computer Mediated Communication allows users to share not only brief messages, but also lengthy (formatted or unformatted) documents - thus facilitating collaborative writing - and also graphics, sounds, and video. Using the World Wide Web (WWW), students can search through millions of files around the world within minutes to locate and access authentic materials (e.g. newspaper and magazine articles, radio broadcasts, short videos, movie reviews, book excerpts) exactly tailored to their own personal interests. They can also use the Web to publish their texts or multimedia materials to share with partner classes or with the general public.

It is not hard to see how computer-mediated communication and the Internet can facilitate an integrative approach to using technology. The following example illustrates well how the Internet can be used to help create an environment where authentic and creative communication is integrated into all aspects of the course.

Students of English for Science and Technology in La Paz Mexico don't just study general examples and write homework for the teacher; instead they use the Internet to actually become scientific writers (Bowers 1995; Bowers 1996). First, the students search the World Wide Web to find articles in their exact area of specialty and then carefully read and study those specific articles. They then write their own drafts online; the teacher critiques the drafts online and creates electronic links to his own comments and to pages of appropriate linguistic and technical explanation, so that students can find additional background help at the click of a mouse. Next, using this assistance, the students prepare and publish their own articles on the World Wide Web, together with reply forms to solicit opinions from readers. They advertise their Web articles on appropriate Internet sites (e.g. scientific newsgroups) so that interested scientists around the world will know about their articles and will be able to read and comment on them. When they receive their comments (by email) they can take those into account in editing their articles for republication on the Web or for submission to scientific journals.

The above example illustrates an integrative approach to using technology in a course based on reading and writing. This perhaps is the most common use of the Internet to date, since it is still predominantly a text-based medium. This will undoubtedly change in the future, not only due to the transmission of audio-visual material (video clips, sound files) World Wide Web, but also due to the growing use of the Internet to carry out real-time audio- and audio-visual chatting (this is already possible with tools such as *NetPhone* and *CU-SeeME*, but is not yet widespread).

Nevertheless, it is not necessary to wait for further technological developments in order to use the Internet in a multi-skills class. The following example shows how the Internet, combined with other technologies, was used to help create an integrated communicative environment for EFL students in Bulgaria - students who until recent years had little contact with the English-speaking world and were taught through a "discrete topic and skill orientation" (Meskill&Rangelova 1995). These Bulgarian students now benefit from a high-tech/low-tech combination to implement an integrated skills approach in which a variety of language skills are practiced at the same time with the goal of fostering communicative competence. Their course is based on a collaborative, interpreted study of contemporary American short stories, assisted by three technological tools:

- *Email communication.* The Bulgarian students correspond by email with an American class of TESOL graduate students to explore in detail the nuances of American culture which are expressed in the stories, and also to ask questions about idioms, vocabulary, and grammar. The American students, who are training to be teachers, benefit from the concrete experience of handling students' linguistic and cultural questions .
- *Concordancing.* The Bulgarian students further test out their hypotheses regarding the lexical and grammatical meanings of expressions they find in the stories by using concordancing software to search for other uses of these expressions in a variety of English language corpora stored on CD-ROM.
- *Audio tape.* Selected scenes from the stories - dialogues, monologues, and descriptions - were recorded by the American students and provide both listening practice (inside and outside of class) and also additional background materials to help the Bulgarians construct their interpretation of the stories.

These activities are supplemented by a range of other classroom activities, such as in-class discussions and dialogue journals, which assist the students in developing their responses to the stories' plots, themes, and characters - responses which can be further discussed with their email partners in the US.

Conclusion :

The history of CALL suggests that the computer can serve a variety of uses for language teaching. It can be a tutor which offers language drills or skill practice; a stimulus for discussion and interaction; or a tool for writing and research. With the advent of the Internet, it can also be a medium of global communication and a source of limitless authentic materials. But as pointed out by Garrett (1991), "the use of the computer does not constitute a method". Rather, it is a "medium in which a variety of methods, approaches, and pedagogical philosophies may be implemented" (p. 75). The effectiveness of CALL cannot reside in the medium itself but only in how it is put to use.As with the audio language lab "revolution" of 40 years ago, those who expect to get magnificent results simply from the purchase of expensive and elaborate systems will likely be disappointed. But those who put computer technology to use in the service of good pedagogy will undoubtedly find ways to enrich their educational program and the learning opportunities of their students.

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