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Exploring the New Perspectives in English Language Teaching: Listening to the CALL
(Computer-Assisted Language Learning)

Abstract

The influence of technological tools has pervaded all aspects of the educational, business, and economic sectors of our world. The computer has established itself firmly not only in the world of business and communication technology, it has also succeeded in acquiring a fundamental role in the educational process. This role becomes more powerful and appealing as computers have entered the accessible zone and carry huge capabilities and extensive effectiveness. This paper seeks to investigate the concept of Computer-Assisted Language Learning and its classification. It underlines various usages of CALL in English language learning and teaching. It, further, reads the importance of the usage of it in the rural region of Rajasthan state. The study finds the transition of focus on the learner, thereby enhancing the learner's autonomy as a significant trait of CALL. The idea of using computers for teaching English language arouses mixed feelings and meets with a variety of reactions. The extensive use of computer enhances its appeal, pertinence and validity on the one hand; on the other hand, the notion of limited accessibility of internet in remote areas and the idea of dominating technology put forth it as the kind of challenge which one feels drawn to respond to. However, computer-assisted language teaching can be considered to be effective in enhancing students learning and addressing certain education problems. The effectiveness of CALL relies on how CALL is utilized to meet language learning goals for individualized learners in specific educational settings.

Key words: Computer-Assisted Language Learning, Internet, language teaching, learners' autonomy, technology

1. Introduction

The course of teaching English language has been swayed from grammar translation method to task based learning, from black board to over head projector and currently interactive boards, from drill and practice to audio-lingual method and authentic and meaningful contextualized discourse. Communication skills, soft skills, technical skills, interpersonal skills, ICT literacy etc. have gained noticeable importance. The need for chiseled graduates to merge successfully in the tough competition of survival in the global market is in great demand nowadays. For this, a change in the trend especially the teaching learning process of English language has been undergoing a transition through incorporating technological assistance in it. The influence of technological tools has pervaded all aspects of the educational, business, and economic sectors of our world. The computer has established itself firmly not only in the world of business and communication technology, it has also succeeded in acquiring a fundamental role in the educational process. This role is becoming more powerful and appealing as computers have entered the accessible zone and carry huge capabilities and extensive effectiveness. The computer can provide a meaning-focused, communicative learning environment, which serves the purpose of communicative language teaching.

Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), which is “the search for and study of application of the computer in language teaching and learning” (Levy, 1), has been a significant development in language teaching and learning. The aim of developing CALL is not to provide language with novelty, but is to improve the quality of language teaching (Cameron, 1989). It is important in colleges and university that CALL design and implementation should meet the needs of L2 learners. More specifically, CALL is the use of computer technologies that promote educational learning, including word processing, presentation packages, guided drill and practice, tutor, simulation, problem solving, games, multimedia CD-ROM, and internet applications such as e-mail, chat and the World Wide Web (WWW) for language learning purposes. There are several terms associated with CALL. CALL is variously known as Computer-Aided Language Learning (CALL), Computer-Assisted Language Instruction (CALI) and Computer-Enhanced Language Learning (CELL).

The first two terms generally refer to computer applications in language learning and teaching, while CELL implies using CALL in a self-access environment (Hoven, 88). The first phase of the CALL was conceived in 1950 and was implemented in 1960s and 1970s. In this method, the computer gives a stimulus to the learner by being not a mere tool but also a tutor. More specifically, CALL is the use of computer technologies that promote educational learning, including word processing, presentation packages, guided drill and practice, tutor, simulation, problem solving, games, multimedia CD-ROM, and internet applications such as e-mail, chat and the websites for language learning purposes.

Types of CALL Activities

- a.) Multiple-choice and true/false Questions
- b.) quizzes, gap-filling
- c.) exercise/cloze, matching,
- d.) reordering/sequencing,
- e.) crossword puzzles, games,
- f.) simulations
- g.) writing & word-processing
- h.) concordancing
- i.) web quests/searching
- j.) web publishing
- k.) online communication
- l.) synchronous-online chat, and asynchronous- e-mail, discussion forum and message board

2. Classification of CALL

CALL has been classified from various perspectives. Tim Johns offers a lively description of four approaches to computer-assisted language teaching, each associated with a

metaphor. Syringe: injecting the learner with knowledge Gymnasium: reflected in words like "drill" and "exercise" Bath: which gives us the expression "total immersion" as a description of learning Test tube: sees the learner as somebody who can discover rules by examining evidence. What is the classification of CALL from the learners' and teachers' perspectives (2). Zhaofeng Jiang classifies CALL from the learners' and teachers' perspectives (109). According to him, instructional, revelatory, conjectural, and emancipator are classification from the learners' perspective. The instructional paradigm is essentially programmed learning. For this type of CALL, students are relatively passive when learning since everything is beforehand programmed. There are less two-way communications between learners and computer, and learners are navigated by the programs. This CALL is almost the same as tutor from teachers' perspective. The revelatory paradigm includes activities where things are revealed gradually to learners through simulation or some kind of problem-solving activity. Text reconstruction can be included under this heading. The conjectural paradigm covers activities in which the learner explores in an unstructured way, tries to teach the computer, or writes programs to solve a problem. This type of CALL requires the learners to have some basic knowledge of computer technology. It is quite like a tutee from teachers' perspective. The emancipatory paradigm refers to the use of computers purely as tools, e.g. for word-processing or on-line dictionary use. Azamat Akborav describes in detail in the chapter, 'Integrating CALL Instruction into Language Teaching Approaches' that, CALL can be classified as tutor, Socratic, tutee and tool (295).

Tutor- The 'CALL as tutor' framework employs the computer programs as tutor of foreign language. Like a traditional teacher, these programs could teach the students in that subject, evaluate the student's results, keep records of how the student is progressing, note the student's weaknesses and determine what exercise should be dealt with next.

Socratic- Socratic is a teaching method, which prefers teaching by asking instead of by telling. The Socratic method encourages participants to reflect and think independently and critically. CALL programs are authored by means of question-and-answer drill. It is just like dialogue drill in language teaching classroom.

Tutee- CALL as tutee places the emphasis on the learners being firmly in control, teaching the computer what to do rather than vice versa. In order to achieve this, the learner must have knowledge of an artificial language such as Visual Basic. To carry out a function the learner must enter a series of instructions in the machine.

Tool- CALL can be presented as a tool. In this case, CALL is just like a learning tool and the learner is not controlled by any programs. This is a totally open teaching method. There are many CALL tools, and in this part, I will just look at four key CALL tools: video conferencing, email, CD, and WWW. Video conferencing, in which participants can see each other and communicate with each other via TV cameras and a screen is a typical synchronous activity: it is akin to a traditional classroom. E-mail is getting to be more and more common. E-mail shares the advantage with the telephone that it is quick, in that it is possible to get an almost immediate answer, but it is much cheaper than long-distance telephoning. An e-mail message can be delivered almost anywhere in the world in just a few minutes, and if the other person is at their computer, we can get a reply very quickly. They may have decided not to answer, or it may take some time to get the information you want. If you have an Internet connection and a program to read Web files (a "browser"), you can take advantage of this useful resource. There are three main ways in which the Web can assist with teaching languages: x Find resources which you can download / print and use with a class. x Allow your students to find resources on their own or use specific materials on-line. x Create your own Web pages / let your students create their own Web pages (Rata, 295-96).

3. Importance of CALL

Computer-Assisted Language Learning approach is considerably different from traditional teaching methods. Language teaching and learning, a two way communication, has been evolving through various stages and phases of teaching and learning. Traditional methods of teaching and learning are, more or less, teacher centered, not flexible and students don't have their own autonomy. Large numbers of students are crowded in a classroom and black or white board make teachers busy although overhead projector makes things a little better. CALL now includes highly interactive and communicative support for listening, speaking, reading and writing, including extensive use of multimedia CD-ROMs and the Internet. Though CALL varies from traditional teaching method to an extent, the aim is the same i.e. to enhance the ability to develop the learners' abilities as the same as native speakers. At the same time, CALL is influenced by traditional language teaching and learning approaches to some extent. CELL (the term CELL is used here in preference to CALL to recognise the enhancing role that computers play in the language learning process) brings the real world into the classroom, makes learning more relevant, develops the learners' sense of responsibility, promotes non-linear and co-operative learning, helps reduce the need for a meta-language, and changes the role of the teacher (Batley & Freudenstein 14). What

distinguishes the computers from other pieces of equipment, such as tape recorders and film projectors, and what forms in fact the basis of its being an educational aid is its interactive capability: “The unique property of the computer as a medium for education is its ability to interact with the student. Books and tape recordings can tell a student what the rules are and what the right solutions are, but they cannot analyze the specific mistake the student has made and react in a manner which leads him not only to correct his mistake, but also to understand the principles behind the correct solution” (Nelson, 29).

4. CALL and Learners’ Autonomy

Information and communication technology encourages learners to share their learning experiences and to build upon their previous knowledge, and therefore provides an appropriate framework for teachers to use to understand how learners become independent in learning and how they gain responsibility for their own learning, which is also referred to as learner’s autonomy (Hedge, 82). Learner autonomy is often defined as learners’ ability to take control of their own learning (Holec, 1981). However, the development of learner autonomy is widely varied depending on teachers’ roles and overall classroom environment. Learners can control their learning processes as much as possible and can become quite independent of teachers when they work with computers. Jones (2001) states that teachers play a great role in developing learner autonomy in Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). For example, students formulate their tasks independently without teachers’ detailed instruction (Toyoda, 2001) and they often reflect on their and their interlocutors’ responses through Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) (Shield, Weininger& Davies, 1999).

Expecting learners to develop autonomy does not seem much feasible in a traditional classroom where the teacher, usually, dominates the learning process due to that the learners have almost no incentive to take responsibility for their own learning. Autonomy connects to independence which is taking responsibility for one’s own progress in the learning process. The increasing use of computers and the Internet have created a succinct or an appropriate environment for learners’ autonomy. Computers, the Internet, and their related tools such as emails, discussion forms, and online chat environments provide language learners with sociable, collaborative, and authentic learning opportunities where they can develop autonomy and take increasing responsibility for their own learning. Moreover, it seems to encourage learner autonomy by allowing students to choose the time, place and circumstances that are conducive to their learning. Computer-Assisted Language Learning programmes can raise learners’ level of motivation in language teaching by providing variety

of topics and offering an option to choose them, and introducing a diversity of study methods inside and outside the classroom.

5. Assessing the applicability of CALL at graduate level in rural region of Rajasthan

The undergraduate students, studying in the first part of a three-year degree course at Government PG Girls' College, Chomu, were taught through using Computer-Assisted Language Learning tools. Students were provided the access to computer and the Internet, initially guided by the teacher-instructor. They were given voice recognition and pronunciation exercises, listening and watching activities, grammar presentation, etc through using CD ROM and showing videos on listening and speaking skills. The material used for it was accessed from the website of the British Council. They were also given the activities and materials that they could employ outside the classroom. Student-learners, a bit hesitant in the beginning, gradually underwent a change; they were noticed to be independent than being teacher-dependent. The assignments, carried out on computers and the Internet, were received with great enthusiasm by the students than were the paper-based assignments. The use of computers and the Internet/ Computer-Assisted Language Learning had a creative impact on students involving them personally and actively even in the out-of-class activities. The researcher confronted some limitations too. The poor accessibility or slow speed of the Internet in the rural interior areas hindered the speed of learning and interrupted the rapport of the learners many a times. Had the accessibility of the Internet been good, the learners would have learned well even outside the classroom. Learners' lack of technical competence, poor interaction among learners, etc. are among some other constraints. However, these challenges were dealt through providing adequate CALL resources at the institution. Apart from these challenges, there is one major issue of fiscal funds. Some CALL hardware and software are very expensive. Therefore, limited funding and lack of proper budget might create a problem for the institutions to buy requisite tools and equipments.

However, the increasing understanding and development of the skills of the learners suggested the utility, and applicability of CALL in the interior regions of Rajasthan. This technique enabled learners to acquire the opportunity to learn correct pronunciation, various accent and listen to native speakers. Videos, colourful pictures and graphs, and handouts motivated learners and made them interested in language learning. Hence, CALL can also be

used to promote learner's autonomy as it encourages student involvement. CALL enables students to study at their own pace at their preferred time and also with minimal teacher involvement. Computers can also be motivating for students as they can show videos, pictures and play audio, this helps students greatly in understanding course materials. Students who find the traditional class room boring because of their passive nature are motivated to actively participate in the class and find it more engaging and enjoyable to learn.

6. Conclusion

The idea of using computers for teaching purposes in subjects like modern languages arouses mixed feelings of success and failure, and meets with a variety of reactions. The extensive use of computer enhances its appeal, pertinence and validity on the one hand; on the other hand, the notion of limited accessibility of internet in remote areas and the idea of dominating technology put forth it as the kind of challenge which one feels drawn to respond to. However, computer-assisted language teaching can be considered to be very effective in enhancing students learning and addressing certain education problems in the current global scenario. To conclude, the effectiveness of CALL relies on how CALL is utilized to meet language learning goals for individual learners in specific educational settings. Furthermore, computer technology has to be treated as an aid, but not a panacea, for the reason that, the effectiveness of CALL cannot reside in the technology itself but in how it is put to use and for what purposes.

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Relevant Websites

<http://www.auralog.com/english.html> – Auralog, producers of CALL Software, France.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages> – BBC Languages, a series of Web pages for learners of foreign languages.

<http://www.camsoftpartners.co.uk/clef.htm> – CLEF, a software package for learners of French, produced by the University of Guelph and published in the UK by Camsoft.

<http://clp.arizona.edu/cls> – Critical Language Series, a CDROM series produced by the University of Arizona.

<http://www.dialang.org> – DIALANG, a diagnostic language testing project, initiated with funding from the European Union.

<http://www.eurotalk.co.uk> – EuroTalk, producers of CALL software, London, UK.

<http://www.history-of-call.org> – History of CALL, a website containing a wealth of information on the history of CALL.

<http://web.uvic.ca/hrd/halfbaked/> – Hot Potatoes, a Webauthoring package produced by Half Baked Software Inc, University of Victoria, Canada.

<http://www.ict4lt.org> – ICT4LT (ICT for Language Teachers), a large collection of ICT training resources for language teachers.