

“CALL” computer assisted language learning.

Víctor Manuel Gallego Espinosa*



Abstract

CALL is an acronym in English which can be translated as “Computer Assisted Language Learning”. That technique has been supported and used by uncountable learners of Languages through last years and it is based on the increasing use of Internet, Multimedia and new technologies, as a part of a didactic resource inside the classroom. CALL takes its part in the Language teaching traditional pedagogy, presenting all kind of virtual tools for teachers and students of a Foreign Language; helping the process of formation for being much more personalized, interesting and attractive.

Key Words: Computer, teaching, learning, language.

El computador como instrumento para el aprendizaje de un idioma

Resumen

CALL es un acrónimo en inglés que puede traducirse como “el aprendizaje de un idioma con la ayuda del computador”. Dicha técnica ha sido sustentada y usada por innumerables estudiosos de los idiomas durante los últimos años y está basada en el incremento del uso de internet, multimedia y de nuevas tecnologías, como recurso didáctico dentro del aula. CALL hace su aporte a la pedagogía tradicional de los idiomas, presentado todo tipo de herramientas virtuales para profesores y estudiantes de un idioma extranjero; ayudando a que el proceso de formación sea mucho más personalizado, interesante y atractivo.

Palabras Claves: Computador, enseñanza, aprendizaje, lenguaje.

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*Especialista en Lingüística Aplicada a la Enseñanza del Inglés, U. Gran Colombia. 2007. Docente Escuela Tecnológica Instituto Técnico Central. Victormanuelster@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Learning English and using computers seem to be one of the most important goals in Colombian education during last years. Some authors suggest that there are some kinds of illiteracy in Colombia and around all over the world and they can be classified in three levels: Reading- Writing, computers use and using a second or third language. It is in that scenario where not only education but specifically languages are joined together with the purpose of involving the learner in languages and technologies such a need to face new challenges in the modern world. Moreover, and it was in that context where CALL (computer assisted language learning) was born and began to be applied and used to languages. It is CALL the tool that modern teachers must use in order to be more effective in their classes. It involves as many choices as the creativity of the teacher can work for instance: presentation, reinforcement, assessment, teaching, learning and so on, as the following definition taken from a virtual encyclopedia, suggests:

“CALL is an acronym for Computer Assisted Language Learning. CALL is a growing field in ILT (Information and Learning Technology) with a wide selection of applications; reference works, study and research tools available as well as plenty of applications targeted at specific English language exams.” Wikipedia (2006).

2. Definition

In general, CALL can refer to any language learning or teaching that involves the computer in a significant way. CALL can be:

- One student on one computer with interactive software.
- Two or three students on one computer with interactive software.
- Students on computers interacting with other students (computer-mediated communication).
- Students on computers working with web-based language content.
- Students interacting with one another and a teacher through a computer (online class).
- A teacher using a single computer and large monitor or data projector for class instruction.

CALL environments can be a classroom, a computer lab with the teacher present, a computer lab with students working independently, or students working at a public computer, at home, or elsewhere. The microcomputer has been a central element of this for the past few decades, although notebook computers and even cell phones are beginning to be utilized.

In his overview, Levy defines computer assisted language learning (CALL) broadly as “The search for and the study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning” (Levy, 1997a, p.1)

3. *The history of CALL*

Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is not a new development in language teaching, as it has been used since the 1960s and 70s. However, it still lacks research methods and a clear theoretical foundation. (Chapelle, 1997).

Nowadays, audiotape based language labs are gradually being replaced by language media centers, where language learners can use multimedia CD ROMs and laser discs, access foreign language documents on the world wide web, and communicate with their teachers, fellow classmates, and native speakers by electronic mail. If language teaching has become more exciting, it has also become considerably more complex. (Kern R., 2000).

We can divide the development of CALL into three distinct phases (Warschauer, 1996): **Behaviorist, communicative and integrative.**

Behaviorist CALL was implemented in the 1960's and 70's, when the Audio-lingual method was mostly used, and provided students with drills and practice. This model used the computer as a tutor, presenting drills and non-judgmental feedback.

Based on the communicative approach, communicative CALL focuses more on using forms rather than on the forms themselves. The communicative CALL programmes provide skill practice in a non-drill format, through language games, reading and text reconstruction. This approach still uses

the computer as a tutor, although it gives students choices, control and interaction. Another CALL model used for communicative activities involves the computer as stimulus, as in programmes that stimulate writing or discussions, and which may not be specifically designed for language learners. Finally, communicative CALL also uses the computer as a tool, in programmes that do not provide language material, but enable the learner to understand and use the language, such as word processors, desktop publishing, spelling and grammar checks programmes, as used for instance in process writing.

The current approach is integrative CALL, which is based on multimedia computers and the Internet. These technological developments have brought text, graphics, sound, animation and video to be accessed on a single inexpensive computer. These resources are all linked and called ‘hypermedia’, enabling learners to navigate through CD-ROMS and the Internet at their own pace and path, using a variety of media.

4. *Characteristics*

Strength of CALL is its ability to create a situation in which learners working alone or in groups can interact with the learning materials and reference materials. This interactivity puts the learning elements under learner control. This control allows learners as individuals to approach the material with their own agendas, and their own actions. Learners using CALL are not or should not be passive; they should need to think about the language, engage with it and to respond to it. The active and involved learner is thought to be a better learner. Interactivity within a CALL environment can take a variety of forms, choosing the learning materials, using the references sources, checking comprehension of language input and reacting to feedback of one's productive efforts. The interactivity of CALL

should provide learners with such opportunities to check, clarify, and confirm their understanding.

CALL can be used in a variety of ways within different learning situations. As mentioned above, use as a self-access resource is one of the most common and obvious. These materials can be linked into courses, syllabuses, assigned to learners for homework or as follow-up activities to work undertaken in classroom sessions. CALL reference materials can also be used by teachers to help in their lesson preparation, providing texts, sound, digital video, grammar or vocabulary exercises that can be used in class.

5. Advantages and disadvantages

CALL has much to offer English language teachers and will have more to offer in the future. We cannot, let us guide ourselves just as if we were blind by the seductive and powerful technology that CALL represents. It is vital to develop and maintain a critical eye on it.

5.1 Advantages

- Provides an opportunity for real communication and community.
- Improves personal confidence.
- Encourages students to overcome writing apprehension.
- Powerful self-access facility.
- It gives a new role to teaching materials.
- Materials are adapted to the requirements of each learner.

- Experiential learning.
- Motivation.
- Enhanced student achievement.
- Authentic materials for study.
- Greater interaction.
- Personalized education.
- Independence from a single source of information.
- Global understanding.

5.2 Disadvantages

- Financial barriers.
- Availability of computer hardware and software.
- Technical and theoretical knowledge.
- Acceptance of technologies.

6. Student and teacher's role

Teachers or students interested in CALL can get involved in a number of different ways. Here are some possibilities.

- **As researchers:** into second language acquisition, human-computer interaction, what works for CALL.
- **As consumers** of CALL software for class use or building web activities into course work
- **As directors,** helping students find and use supplementary CALL materials or web resources.

- **As managers** of computer-mediated communication among learners in and out of class.
- **As software or web developers**, either “from scratch” or adding new materials to existing templates.
- **As coaches** to help students develop software, websites, and general computer literacy.
- **As CALL experts** for your program, helping other teachers and administrators with CALL implementations **As CALL professionals**, consulting on external projects, doing software reviews for journals, making conference presentations, writing papers, interpreting and applying CALL research, and/or providing input to the field at large.

7. Techniques

Each technique can be taught, considering the computer roles and its applications:

- **Computer as a tutor:** Programs designed for teaching grammar, Listening, Reading, Text reconstruction, Vocabulary, Writing and Comprehension.
- **Computer as stimulus:** The computer as stimulus category includes software, which is, used not so much as a tutorial in itself but to generate analysis, critical thinking, discussion, and writing.
- **Computer as tool:** The most common use of computer as tool can be summarized as Word processing, Grammar checkers, Concordances, Collaborative writing, Reference, Internet and Authoring.

8. Methodology

According to the experience, teachers do not stick rigidly to a single theory of language learning, nor do they employ a single methodology to put into practice the various theories in which they subscribe. It is recommended Reuven Feuerstein’s proposal on cognitive Modifiability and instrumental enrichment (Prieto Ma.Dolores, 1986), particularly in reference to the expression of abilities which are manifested in the stages of: **ENTRY, ELABORATION AND EXIT.**

Entry phase: The purpose of this phase is to introduce the theme and to see how the perceptive motor skills will work with it. Some warming up activities are going to help students for understanding better the topic. Then, teacher and students will be interacting about the topic in the classroom, before using the computer. After, students will practice their basic or previous knowledge and will share some questions with the teacher in the other part of the class. Activities will motivate students to learn the new topic and at the same time, they will be developing skills to identify the future task.

Students will enjoy the work, because they will make it in different ways and teacher will guide them as a motivator. Students also will be using all kind of skills in order to identify the topic, to develop it and relate it to new possibilities as multimedia and internet. Through all the process students will be using, identifying, comparing and classifying multiple information prepared by the teacher.

Elaboration phase: The main objective of this phase is to use the computer (CALL) as a tool, to learn, practice and enjoy at the same time about a specific topic.

According to Reuven Feuerstein's proposal on cognitive Modifiability and instrumental enrichment (Prieto Ma.Dolores, 1986) the following elements should be included during the process: Content, operations, kind, complexity, level of abstraction, level of efficiency, identification, differentiation, mental representation, mental transformation, comparisons, classification and decoding.

Exit phase: After last two phases students will be ready to build, change and recreate the knowledge about the topic. To do that, some more activities will be given to develop which can be done during the class or later. Those activities will be guided by the teacher and supported with some extra material as worksheets and related tasks to be developed at home.

8.1 Resources

- a) **Programs especially designed for English language learning:** There are exercises thought for beginners, intermediate and advanced students. For this, a number of programs are used. **Gapmaster, Matchmaster, Choicemaster, Testmaster, Storyboard, Text-mixer, Wordstore, Dynamic English, Ellis mastery, English Discoveries Network, Rosetta stone, and Vocabulary Games.**
- b) **Ludicrous programs:** Some examples of this kind of programs are Computer Scrabble, Hangman, Wheel of Fortune and The Secret of the Monkey Island.
- c) **Word Processors:** Word processors can be used to create an endless number of exercises in English -filling in the gaps; rearranging disordered paragraphs in a text; replacing incorrect words by the corresponding correct ones.

9. References

9.1 Resources

1. For Listening Comprehension

- World Radio Network:
www.wrn.org/audio
- Weekly Idioms:
www.comenius.com/idiom
- Funny Short Animations in Flash:
www.flashring.com

2. For Reading Comprehension

- BookWeb : www.ambook.org/
- Children's Web Literature Guide:
www.ucalgary.ca
- Fluency Through Fables:
www.comenius.com/fable

3. For Writing

- Cultural Topics-Advanced Reading and Writing:
<http://darkwing.woregon.edu>
- Writing OWLs:
www.umass.edu/english

4. Tests on the Web

- ALTE(The Association of Language Testers in Europe): www.edunet.com/alte/
- ILTA(International Language Testing Association): www.surrey.ac.uk
- University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate: <http://vanlang.com/vli>

5. For Grammar Teaching and Learning

- Cutting Edge Grammar:
www.chorus.cycor.ca
- Daves ESL Quiz Page:
www.pacific.net
- General Grammar:
www.englishpage.com
- Grammar in Spanish:
www.mansioningles.com
- Basic Grammar in Spanish:
www.aulafacil.com

6. For Dictionaries and Encyclopaedias

- Dictionary of Technical and Natural English:
<http://crnvmc.cer/FIND/Dictionary>
- Roget's Thesaurus: gopher://gopher.dlu.dr
- The Oxford English Dictionary Online:
www.oed.com
- Encyclopaedia Britannica:
www.-pf.eb.com:189
Wikipedia: www.wikipedia.org

7. For Newspapers

- BBC: www.bbcnc.org.uk/index
- CNN: www.cnn.com
- Financial Times, The: www.ft.com
- New York Times, The: www.nytimes.com
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