



LINGUISTICS DEPARTMENT - STANFORD UNIVERSITY

An Invitation to CALL

Foundations of Computer-Assisted Language Learning

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An Invitation to CALL

Unit 7: CALL Learner Training

OVERVIEW

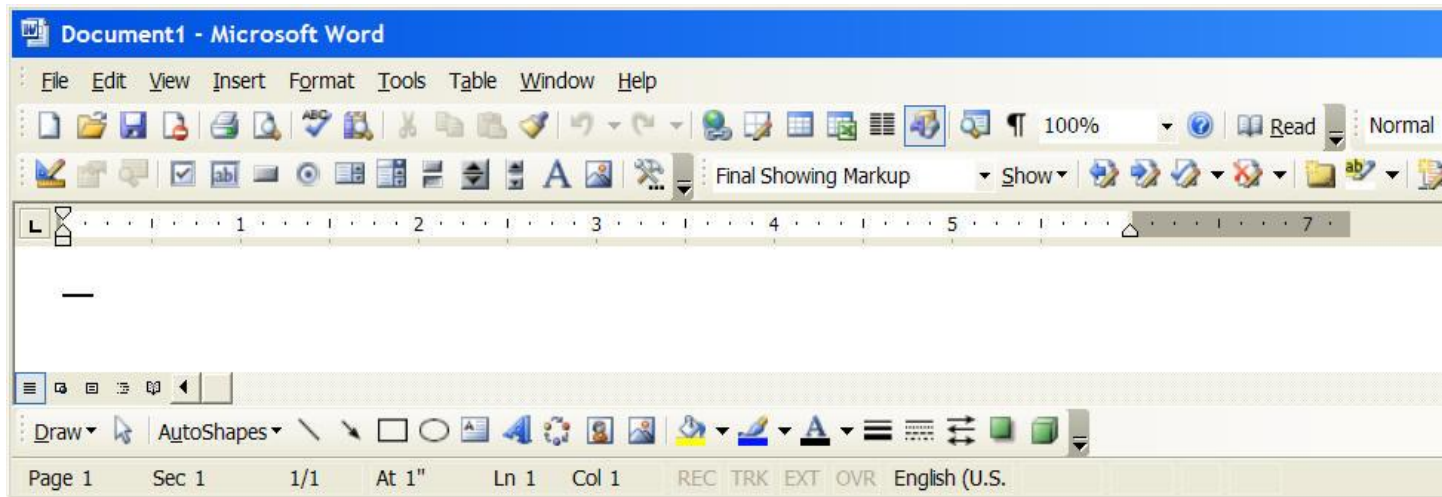
CALL has given us some amazing possibilities for improving language learning. However, these possibilities create a problem. Absent a teacher, students using computers are typically given more control over their own learning. Due to the newness of computer environments and the range of choices in many CALL applications, they are arguably unprepared to take on this responsibility. The result is that students may not use the computers in ways that are effective for achieving language learning objectives, and it is even less likely that they will use them in ways that are *most* effective.

One way out of this dilemma is to spend time training learners in dealing appropriately with this new environment. In the process, we may be able not only to help them with their CALL use, but also help them in general to become more effective autonomous learners. Surprisingly, this is not a well-developed area of CALL. However, it is important enough in my experience to warrant significant attention. As Jones (1999) remarked with respect to using CALL materials in self-access centers, "it seems very likely that for most students CALL will need more learner training and more of the teacher's presence than any other operations..."

Before continuing, let's consider three alternatives to CALL learner training...

One solution is to try to build software in such a way that it adapts to the learner on a number of different levels: language proficiency, computer proficiency, learning style, topical interest, motivational type and intensity, and so on. This was an early promise of CALL software; however, arguably we have not even come close to realizing such a program, and the degree of software-directed adaptation remains low or non-existent in currently available materials.

A second alternative is to take the philosophical position that learners have a right to self-discovery and that left alone they will naturally move to the strategies that work for them and that are consonant with their learning style. This would mean that given a tutorial program with a set of help options, they would make use of the ones that are most efficacious for them and ignore the others. It seems highly unlikely that this would be the case for most students. For example, you probably know how to use *Microsoft Word* (or some similar word processing application). How many of its features do you *really* know how to use? Open *Word* (an example from Word 2003 for Windows appears below, but any version will suffice) now and look at the top level. Do you know what's under File, Edit, View, Insert, etc.? Do you know what the underscore means in commands like File?



If you pull down those menus and find some features you are uncertain about or never knew existed, this is a good demonstration of how hours (hundreds of hours in some cases) of contact alone with a piece of software will not automatically lead to efficient use. (By the way, if you already know all this stuff, you're in the minority). Evidence that a high percentage of today's university students do not have the skills they need to use computers effectively for language learning can be found in Winke & Goertler (2008).

A third alternative is to acknowledge that learners would profit from training but that it's just too much trouble to train them since it obviously takes a lot of time away from other aspects of language learning and there's no guarantee it will be successful. This may indeed be the case in some instances, but this should be determined on a case by case basis, using at least a rough cost vs. benefit analysis.

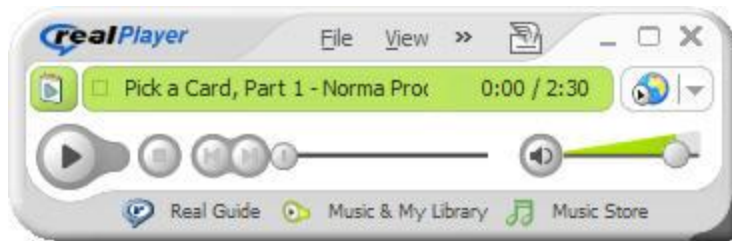
TECHNICAL TRAINING

Let us proceed under the assumption that it is worth the trouble to do at least some training. What do we need to do?

Training can be divided at least into two areas: technical and pedagogical (you may recall that this was the same division as for teachers in [Unit 1](#)). Technical training naturally includes general computer literacy (which can be a major issue or not depending on your setting and

students), but of greater interest here is learning technical skills and knowledge of particular value to language learning.

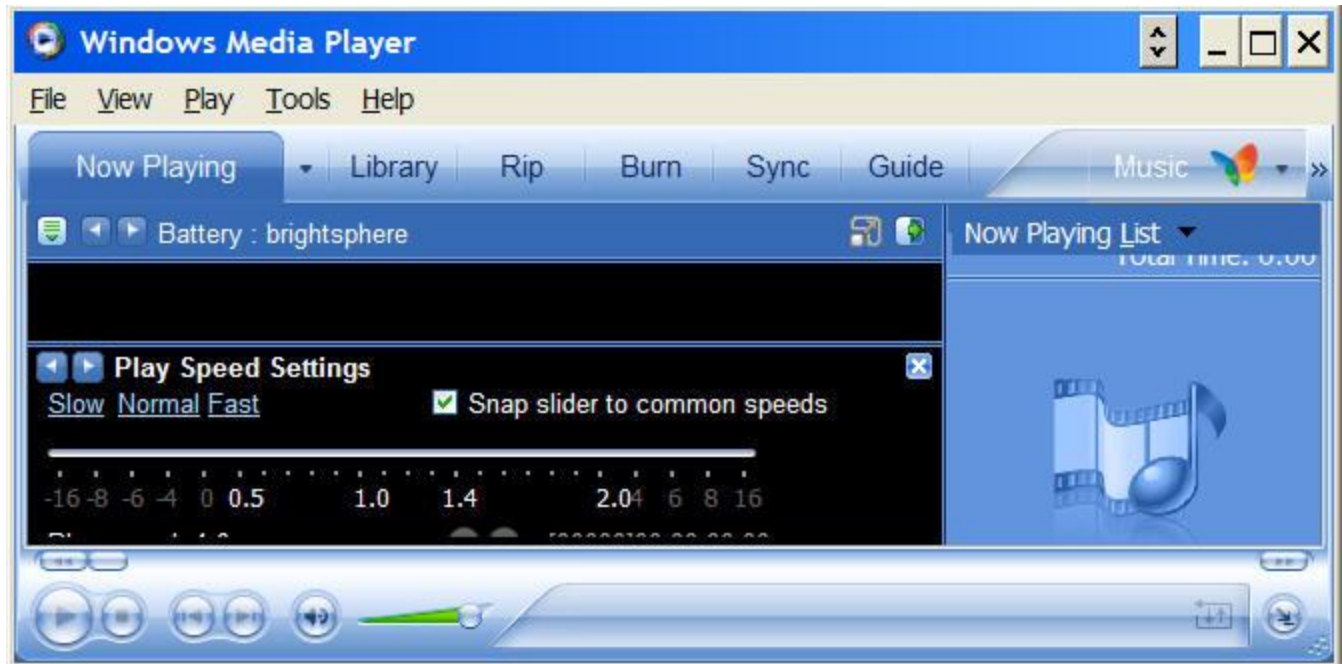
Here is one example: most audio/video players, for instance (Real, QuickTime, Windows Media), often have a default setting that is small:



But by dragging the bottom right corner, the player can be stretched. This gives much finer control when using the slide bar to repeat a segment.



Here's another example: recent versions of Windows Media Player have a "play speed" control that allows learners to slow down (or speed up) sound files (accessed through View > Enhancements > Play Speed Settings). A lot of students are unaware of this. Although some previous research suggested that listening at a slower speed does not necessarily aid comprehension, one key study (Zhao, 1997) showed that when students are given control over the speed, rather than having it controlled by the teacher, their comprehension improves. For some students at least, a slower speed may make linkages across word boundaries more noticeable, and it may be quite helpful for certain tasks and types of material to have this additional control.



These are just two of many instances of technical knowledge that can potentially be of help to language learners.

PEDAGOGICAL TRAINING

In a 2004 paper (Hubbard, 2004), I make a case for giving training not just on technical aspects but also on pedagogical ones, that is, how to use the tutorial software or tool effectively to meet specific learning objectives. To this end, I offer a set of five principles for learner training, summarized below.

1. **Experience CALL yourself.** Try a piece of CALL software (like [Rosetta Stone](#)) for a language you don't know, or visit a chatroom for a language you are not fluent in. This was the recommended assignment for [Unit 1](#). The assumption here is that by knowing what it's like from the learner's side, you'll be able to give better advice.
2. **Give learners teacher training.** Let them know some of what you know if they are to become more independent. Help them develop a "language learning approach" that is consistent with what you consider a valid language teaching approach. In particular, try to give them practice with linking the procedures and strategies they use with software, online tasks, and CMC activities to specific language learning objectives.
3. **Use a cyclical approach.** Teach a bit at a time. Don't just have a training session at the beginning and think your job is done. If anything, let learners "play" awhile with the application so that they have some familiarity with it before formal training begins. Learning (both technical and pedagogical) should be incremental but also include plenty of recycling and reviewing key concepts and strategies.
4. **Use collaborative debriefings.** Get learners to discuss their experiences, successes and failures with the CALL tasks and software in pairs or small groups. Don't just make the instruction one-way from you. Having learners talk about lab experiences at the end of a

session helps consolidate it, and discussing their individual experiences (at home or a drop-in lab) at the following class provides a way of avoiding the sense of isolation that comes from working on the computer alone.

5. **Teach general exploitation strategies.** Show learners ways to use software to make it easier if it's too hard and harder if it's too easy, as well as how to mine the material for uses different from those intended by the developer. For example, many CALL tutorial exercises involve multiple choice. By teaching learners to resize windows so that the list of possible answers is hidden, the question becomes both a more challenging and a more natural open-ended one. Learners similarly need training in how to use text support (transcripts and captions) effectively for audio and video so that the language learning objective is supported. For CMC activities, some training in the rationale for and techniques of effectively negotiating meaning is valuable. In general, learners need to build a repertoire of strategies that they can use to realize the language learning potential in dedicated CALL software, CMC tasks and online language material.

Of course, in order to be effective at training students, it is necessary to thoroughly analyze the software, task, or activity you are assigning. You need to be sure that *you* can make the connections between given actions and learning objectives before you can expect your students to do so on their own.

An updated version of this framework is currently under development. It acknowledges *three* domains for training instead of two--technical, strategic, and pedagogical--by moving some of what was previously considered pedagogical training to the more commonly recognized area of strategy training. See www.j-let.org/~wcf/proceedings/d-060.pdf for a brief description of that model.

STANDARDS: One way of improving especially the technical competence of learners is through general proficiency training in this area. The International Society for Technology in Education (<http://www.iste.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=NETS>) has promoted both teacher and student standards (primarily focused on the US K-12 constituency), and **TESOL** has also produced a technology standards framework for students and teachers aimed internationally at all levels. Both organizations acknowledge the responsibility of teacher education programs and educational institutions to ensure students and teachers meet these standards. A description of some of the TESOL Standards and how they were developed is online at <http://www.j-let.org/~wcf/proceedings/d-025.pdf>, and the Standard themselves are available at https://iweb.tesol.org/Purchase/ProductDetail.aspx?Product_code=EBK1.

LEARNER TRAINING MATERIALS: Union County College - CALL Suggested Strategies Website <http://staff.ucc.edu/alc-paez/esl/call/index.htm>. This site has materials for both technical and pedagogical training for the applications used by the English program at UCC. Examples of materials used in learner training can also be found at my advanced listening website: www.stanford.edu/~efs/693b.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY: Go to a website like www.esl-lab.com or www.elllo.org. First, familiarize yourself with the main parts of the site (or all of it). Then try to determine 1) what basic technical training students might need to use the site effectively; 2) what more advanced

technical training would be helpful; 3) how pedagogical training would connect to this, both site-specific and generalized; 4) finally, how might you "teach" this information to them?

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