LINGUISTICS DEPARTMENT - STANFORD UNIVERSITY

An Invitation to CALL

Foundations of Computer-Assisted Language Learning

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Unit 8: Conclusion

In the past seven units you have been introduced to a wide variety of applications of the computer for language teaching. In Unit 1, we talked about the history of CALL, the tutor-tool distinction, and the various roles you can play as a participant in the CALL field. Unit 2 looked at tutorial software, focusing on evaluation but also discussing issues of development and implementation. Unit 3 gave an overview of the different ways computers on a local network or the Internet can be used for communicative activities. Unit 4 introduced a number of ways in which the World Wide Web has been used either directly or indirectly in language learning, covering tutorial sites, online tools and web-based activities such as WebQuests. In Unit 5, we linked computer uses in the four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, as well as grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and culture, through descriptions of applications and issues in each of those areas. Unit 6 touched on CALL research and Unit 7 introduced learner training for CALL.

Although it has attempted to be somewhat comprehensive, the course has admittedly offered a skewed impression of the current state of the field. In the past few years, there has been a much stronger interest in CMC and the web compared with tutorial CALL, particularly in TESOL. At recent TESOL conventions, for instance, there have been many more tool-oriented presentations compared with those involving the computer in the tutorial role. Tutorial CALL still has importance from the learner's perspective however, especially for listening, as the popularity of sites such as English, Baby! (www.englishbaby.com), Randall's Cyber Listening Lab (http://www.esl-lab.com), and the English Listening Lesson Library Online (http://www.elllo.org/) attest.

And despite that aim of being comprehensive, there are a number of areas related to CALL that we either did not cover at all or just mentioned in passing. I would like to mention a few of them here and provide some direction for future self-study.

Concordancing. Concordance programs such as Athelstan's (http://www.athel.com) MonoConc are tools that allow you to tap into large collections of texts, called corpora, to discover how language is actually used. There are also web-based concordancers available: see www.edict.com.hk/concordance/ for example. If you put in a word or phrase, for instance, these programs will search for examples of that item in context and return a listing. Although originally designed for research purposes, language teachers have adopted it as a tool for language learners. See Guy Aston's *Learning with Corpora* (http://athel.com/product_info.php?products_id=33) for more information. Using concordancers is connected to the more general area of data-driven language learning: a number of useful tools in this area can be found at Tom Cobb's Lextutor site, http://www.lextutor.ca/. Some background on this area of the field can be found in Chambers (2005), http://llt.msu.edu/vol9num2/pdf/chambers.pdf.

Learning Management Systems. Learning management systems, or LMSs (sometimes also called course management systems), include commercial systems like Blackboard and WebCT that are used either for online courses or for online elements of classroom-based courses. As the label suggests, they are used by instructors and institutions to organize course materials and assignments and maintain records of student learning activities. They have features such as discussion boards, synchronous chat and web-based testing that make them appealing for language teaching. A free, open-source LMS popular with language teachers is Moodle: www.moodle.org. These are becoming increasingly popular for managing courses on campus and are particularly valuable for online teaching. Robb (2004) provides an introduction to Moodle for language teaching: http://tesl-ej.org/ej30/m2.html.

Computer-Based Language Testing. Although testing is not a direct part of language *learning*, it is clearly an area of interest to language teachers. For proficiency testing, TOEFL (www.toefl.org) and other commercial proficiency tests are now offered primarily through computer at testing centers. Ordinate Corporation's PhonePass (now Pearson Corporation's Versant) is a telephone-based oral proficiency test that is entirely machine-scored using an innovative speech recognition system. Some commercial language schools and publishers now use online testing for placement and diagnostic purposes. Online testing and quizzing is also offered through LMSs or dedicated testing programs. The May 2001 issue of Language Learning & Technology (http://llt.msu.edu/vol5num2/default.html) was devoted to computer-based language testing. Chapelle & Douglas (2006) provides an excellent overview of this area of CALL: Chapelle, C & DOuglas, D. (2006). *Assessing Language through Computer Technology.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (see the review at http://www.tesl-ej.org/wordpress/past-issues/volume10/ej40/ej40r7/).

Communities of Practice. While we have assumed here that you can learn about CALL through course work or self-study, another way is to interact with other language teachers who are similarly on their own. An example is the Webheads (http://webheadsinaction.org/) community. There are also discussion lists through CALICO (www.calico.org), the TESOL CALL Interest

Section (www.call-is.org), and TESL-L (http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/~tesl-l/). Elizabeth Hanson-Smith provides an partially annotated list of community of practice resources at http://webpages.csus.edu/~hansonsm/CoP_Resources.html.

Teacher Education for CALL. Unit 1 touched on this area, but now that this mini-course is concluding, it's worth looking again at opportunities in teacher education. If you are looking ahead to a Master's or certificate program, it is worth checking to see which ones include technology training and what the nature of that training is. A number of universities around the world offer dedicated CALL degrees. See Graham Davies' site for a listing: www.camsoftpartners.co.uk/courses.htm. In finding a suitable CALL training opportunity, it is important to find one that fits your needs depending on your existing level of computer expertise. Some certificate programs and workshops in particular may focus on *how* to use the computer rather than *why*. It's best to have both. Some useful resources can be found in the support site for *Teacher Education in CALL*, http://www.stanford.edu/~efs/callted. Both CALICO and EuroCALL now have special interest groups devoted to teacher education and technology, and CALICO has a volume devoted to the topic: https://www.calico.org/page.php?id=411 Related to this topic, TESOL has published a framework for student and teacher technology standards (http://iweb.tesol.org/Purchase/ProductDetail.aspx?Product_code=EBK1). See http://www.j-let.org/~wcf/proceedings/d-025.pdf for a short paper describing the development of these standards.

Tracking. Tracking of student use of computer applications has been a part of CALL research since the beginning, but a lot of research, both formal and informal, has relied on other data such as pre- and post-testing, observation, think-aloud and recall protocols, and simply student attitude surveys to determine effectiveness. Tracking routines for tutorial software automatically record student use of software, and for CMC, you can keep logs of chat sessions or review emails or submissions to discussion boards. Tracking is important not only in research, but also in teacher diagnosis of student problems (with the language *or* the software) and in adaptive testing or intelligent tutoring. As computers become more powerful and LMSs more sophisticated, we can expect more advances in tracking. For research in particular, though, this opens up questions of privacy that must be reviewed by human subject committees.

New areas: Web 2.0, Mobile Learning, and Virtual Worlds.

Web 2.0 refers to the democratization of the web through blogs, wikis (such as Wikipedia), photo and video sharing sites like youtube, social spaces like Facebook, and customer reviews on sites like Amazon and yelp, and numerous other applications. These allow students access to authentic language (sometimes "authentic" within the specific genre though) and opportunities to collaborate and publish. A discussion of Web 2.0 and the concept of "tagging" can be found at http://llt.msu.edu/vol10num2/emerging/default.html.

Mobile learning as the name suggests refers to learning that takes place through mobile devices like mp3 players, mobile phones, pocket PCs and so on. Although there are clear limitations to the quantity and quality of information that can be accessed and exchanged, the ubiquity of some of these devices and student familiarity with them makes this an interesting area for further

development. A good introduction to this area by Chinnery (2006) can be found at http://llt.msu.edu/vol10num1/pdf/emerging.pdf.

Virtual worlds are 3-dimensional online environments where students in the form of projected avatars interact with one another and native speakers as well as with "physical" objects and spaces within the world. They are in some ways the descendants of MOOs discussed in Unit 3. A number of groups have experimented with language learning in Second Life (www.secondlife.com). For an overview see Vance Stevens' article at http://tesl-ej.org/ej39/int.html.

The Future? Predictions made even 15 years ago tended to focus on more intelligent tutorial software and the promise of multimedia. We were looking for opportunities to make learning more efficient and individualized through computers. Then came the web and the spread of CMC, along with social constructivist methodology, making collaboration and communication through computers a stronger focus. I am betting on a future that has room for both. In recent presentations, Claire Bradin Siskin and I have argued for a softening of the tutor-tool distinction (Another Look at Tutorial CALL). I anticipate increased recognition that blended environments building on the complementary strengths of tutorial software; text, audio, and video CMC; authentic language from the web; and the face-to-face interaction of students to teacher and students to students will yield more effective learning than any of these in isolation. Of course we can continue to see development of the new areas discussed above.

Who knows what's next? CALL will never be boring!
