

with the non-neutrality of technology, or the “hegemonies” of CALL (Lamy & Pegrum, 2010). Many scholars argue that technology is by no means neutral, and emphasize the importance of a critical approach toward the use of technology for educational purposes (Albirini, 2004; Bowers, 1998; Reinhardt & Isbell, 2002). In fact, Bowers (1998, p. 54) goes so far as to claim that “thinking within the decision matrix of the software program really involves using the pattern of thinking of the people who designed the software.” But that’s another story, which can wait for the next issue! Stay tuned... ;-)

### Some online CALL journals to explore:

Language Learning and Technology < <http://llt.msu.edu> >

The Journal of Teaching English with Technology < <http://www.tewtjournal.org/> >

ReCALL Journal < <http://www.eurocall-languages.org/recall/> >

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**While we need to always be aware of the options that technology offers us and should know how to make use of those options when the opportunity arises, the decision whether or not to actually apply modern technologies in our classes is a decision which needs to be carefully considered separately each time, for each individual class**

Even when gaining access to a computer lab is not an issue, implementing technology can still include many difficulties which the principled teacher needs to be aware of before committing herself/himself. Some of these difficulties are: Cultural conflicts and resistance; frequent website filtering; slow and/or unreliable Internet connections; the “digital divide” between the *haves* and *have-nots* of society; lack of fellow practitioners or a community of practice; little or no tech support; and the rigidity of the educational curriculum (Marandi, 2010).

**Task 2:** What other difficulties can you think of that would require awareness and careful planning on your part? How can you overcome these problems, as well as the problems listed above?

An important difficulty that CALL practitioners need to be prepared for is the possible resistance of various stakeholders,

including the learners themselves and their parents. As technology becomes increasingly integrated into our daily lives, this is becoming less of a problem, but it is still one which we cannot afford to ignore. Parents, for example, may resist for a host of reasons—often quite valid—such as the added economic burden of paying for computers, printers, Internet connections, etc. A responsible CALL teacher will take this into consideration and take great care not to burden the student’s family with unnecessary expenses. Even more important, however, are the moral and religious concerns of many families. As Marandi (2010) points out,

Many parents worry about the long-term effect that using computers and the Internet may have on their children. They are aware of the widely acknowledged ‘addiction’ to computers that can lead to less exercise, socializing, and studying and more ‘fooling around’ with the computer. Furthermore, many parents are concerned about the objectionable content of some websites, such as those containing inappropriate ‘mature’ sexual content, and they worry about the demoralizing effect such websites can have on their kids.... A similar concern is the apprehension that extensive use of the Internet will bring about a cultural loss, leading children to ultimately put aside or undervalue their own culture. The increasingly common use of Persian English or Penglish among Iranians on the Internet (also known as Farsi English or Finglish) has many worried that the Persian language will also suffer in the long run. (p. 185)

Another important concern prevalent in many educational circles has to do

teacher obviously plans carefully for all her/his classes, and a CALL class should certainly be no exception. If you do not know what you are doing or should be doing, the smallest risk that you run is that your attempts to incorporate CALL into your class will fail when they could have been a resounding success. This, in turn, can discourage you from making further experiments.

As an example, one issue which needs to be addressed early on by anyone interested in CALL is gaining access to a fully equipped computer lab, or, failing that, a classroom with at least one computer. Due to the limited facilities of many schools, institutes, and universities, even this much is not always feasible—although my personal experience is that a little persistence and lobbying can sometimes go a long way, especially as many managers have already begun to feel the need to update their equipment and seem to be merely waiting for a nudge from others.

Now that an increasing number of families have invested in personal computers, implementing CALL without having at least one computer in the classroom is no longer *impossible*, but it is still not a decision to be made lightly. At the very least, it should lead the teacher to seriously consider whether the merits of adding the technology (without actually *having* the technology!) would outweigh the difficulties it would create, such as the additional burden it would lay on the shoulders of those who do not

have computers at home, or those who do have the hardware but lack the necessary know-how or confidence to work at home unsupervised.

It is my personal belief that when new technologies are to be introduced to an inexperienced group of students, the teacher and students need to meet at least once (and preferably twice) in a computer lab where the learners can actually experience the technology first-hand under the direct supervision of the teacher. One somewhat extreme possibility is to make use of a cyber-café for those sessions when there is no access to a computer lab. However, there are less desirable but perhaps more practical scenarios, such as the teacher bringing a laptop and projector to class and merely showing the students what they should do. Under such circumstances, the very least that the teacher should do, in my opinion, would be to provide the students with complete slides to take home, including screenshots of the different stages of the implementation process, as well as giving them a contact number for emergencies. No doubt, such carefulness may lose importance over time as we gradually find ourselves dealing with newer generations of students, often with more technology familiarity than we have ourselves—the so-called “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001). However, there is no excuse for assuming that all students have equal access and sufficient abilities when that may not be the case; and no learner should feel that the mere addition of technology to the class has disadvantaged her/him.

**Task 1:** Make a list of the technologies you are comfortable with and might consider using in a language class. Now do the following:

a. Write how you use each for your personal needs. Try to impartially decide how such uses can directly affect your *language* skills.

b. Now try to determine which educational needs of your students could be addressed by such technologies. On which language skills might they have a significant impact? On which would the effect be negligible?

c. Finally, consider how you normally try to achieve such an impact without the use of technology in class. Which method is more effective for the acquisition of

the skills you have in mind? Which requires more class time and resources? Do the advantages of using technology (especially in terms of learning) outweigh the difficulties and disadvantages?

It is quite possible, of course, that as of yet you do not have enough experience and knowledge to be able to answer the above questions accurately, which would be all the more reason for being careful. Under such circumstances, the wisest approach would be to first fully explore the technology under question, familiarizing yourself sufficiently with it. This should be accompanied by reflecting on the educational possibilities of the technology, as well as building on the experiences of others, through extensive reading on the topic (see the end of this article for links to some useful CALL-related journals), and preferably joining a related community of practice (Inshallah, this will be discussed further in the next issue). It is only after going through the above procedures that I would advise you to carefully experiment with a new technology in your language classes. If this all sounds too difficult, the good news is that these articles are intended to help you do just that.

### **What are the risks of embarking on a CALL experience without necessary preparation?**

While a healthy amount of risk-taking is actually a necessary characteristic of a successful CALL practitioner, a successful



*our students will like it.* There should be a compelling reason for using it.

The same is true for the *kind* of technology we choose to apply to a particular situation. This might seem like stating the obvious, but unfortunately, many of those who are convinced of the merits of CALL but are not very familiar with the options technology has to offer, use those technologies they are familiar with for all or many of their language classes, indiscriminately. For example, they may use weblogs (or email, or online dictionaries, etc.) for all or any of their language classes, whether the focus of the class is on listening, speaking, reading, or writing. Usually the reason behind such behavior is not that they have seriously weighed the merits and demerits of such a choice; instead it is more likely to be due to their being determined to use some kind

of technology in their classes, and their being more familiar with that particular form than the others.

This is a dangerous approach to CALL, and I am firmly convinced that we would be better off without CALL than with such a faulty and irresponsible approach to it. As I have written elsewhere (Marandi, forthcoming):

While it is often the case that the inexperienced CALL teacher first chooses which technology is more intriguing and then plans the rest of the syllabus around that, the more experienced CALL teachers first decide what kinds of teachers they want to be and what type of class/syllabus they believe in, and then select the technology which seems more likely to lead to the desired outcome—and, of course, *desist* if there is nothing of importance to be gained by using modern technology.



Interestingly, this relationship is a mutual one, with the English language also being strongly influenced by the Internet. Studies have indicated the emergence of new writing styles under the influence of computer-mediated communication—writing styles with more flexibility and less formality (Gains, 1999; Gimenez, 2000). Also, an overwhelming number of highly popular new words, phrases and acronyms have been introduced into English under the influence of the Net (Marandi, 2002), to say nothing of all kinds of smileys and emoticons, which used to be the stamp of the computer geek, but which are now a familiar feature of electronic texts. (For example, see <http://www.netlingo.com>.)

All these have direct implications for English language learning/teaching, the more so since the fairly recent emergence of literacies and multiliteracies (New London Group [NLG], 1996), which now include such literacies as computer literacy, electronic literacies, technological literacy, media literacy, silicon literacies, etc. (Dakers, 2006; Snyder, 2002; Warschauer, 1999). In fact, some scholars have suggested that the very nature of online texts is different from that of printed texts (Levy, 1997, uses the terms linear vs. nonlinear texts), and therefore involves different processes and requires somewhat different skills (Warschauer, 1999). This has prompted Marandi (forthcoming) to argue:

This seems to indicate the importance of CALL as going beyond the simple acquisition of language through the medium

of technology. Technology, it appears, is no longer merely a tool to be utilized; it is part of the literacy to be acquired, *part of the construct to be learned.* (italics in original)

## Should we apply CALL in our own language classes?

To many it might seem that an affirmative reply to this question necessarily follows the above discussion. And while I believe that all teachers should know how to implement CALL in their classes and should at the very least experiment with CALL, I would also like to emphasize that knowing *how* to apply advanced technology to one's language classes does not necessarily imply knowing *when* it is best to apply it. In fact, I would argue that there is a great difference between the two types of knowledge, and that the second is harder to acquire than the first. Therefore, if the above question is rephrased as follows: "Should we apply CALL in our own language classes if there is nothing to be gained that cannot be achieved without it?" the answer would be an unequivocal, decided "No!"

While we need to always be aware of the options that technology offers us and should know how to make use of those options when the opportunity arises, the decision whether or not to actually apply modern technologies in our classes is a decision which needs to be carefully considered separately each time, for each individual class. We should not use technology merely because it is there, or because it is popular, or to prove to others that we can, or *even just because we think*

## **W**hat is CALL?

Although this may seem too obvious to require explanation, the truth is that there is much debate among specialists about exactly what constitutes CALL. Briefly, however, and for the purposes of the present discussion, any use of modern (mainly digital) technologies for the purpose of language learning/teaching is included under the umbrella term CALL (which is pronounced to rhyme with *wall*, *tall*, *ball*, etc.). Such a broad definition would include all applications of CMC (i.e., Computer-Mediated Communication) to language learning, and applies also to the use of such technologies as stand-alone software, MP3/MP4/MP5 players, camcorders, mobile phones, ebook readers, PDAs (i.e. personal digital assistants), notebooks, netbooks, interactive whiteboards, etc.

In addition to the acronym CALL, quite a few popular acronyms may be found in the literature, such as TELL (i.e., Technology-Enhanced Language Learning), NBLT (i.e., Network-Based Language Teaching), WELL (i.e., Web-Enhanced Language Learning), CASLA (i.e., Computer Applications in Second Language Acquisition), and more (see, for example, Chapelle, 2001; Lamy & Hampel, 2007; and Warschauer & Kern, 2000), and there is sometimes debate on whether the acronym CALL is comprehensive enough to include all the different applications of digital technologies to second language acquisition. However, all in all, the

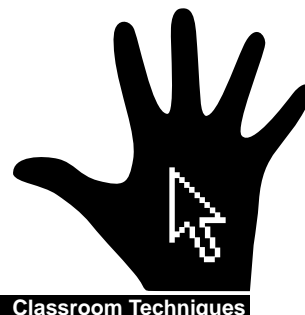
acronym CALL seems to have maintained its popularity and, perhaps somewhat arbitrarily, has been taken by its proponents to include such widely varying applications as mentioned above.

## **D**o we really need to learn about CALL?

The answer to this, in my opinion, is an unqualified yes. It doesn't take genius to realize that our lives are becoming irrevocably intertwined with technology. We can all think of technologies which are now an unquestioned part of our lives and yet did not even exist 5, 10, or 15 years ago—and the tempo of such sweeping changes is increasing exponentially and bewilderingly. Digital technologies are here to stay and, more to the point, their mastery is quickly becoming integral to our understanding of “literacy” and being “educated” (Kasper, 2000).

Due to the nature of the Internet, which presently dominates the lion's share of technology-enhanced education, the relationship between such technologies and the mastery of English is even more glaringly obvious. The great majority of online texts are still English, despite a healthy increase in texts written in other languages. Academicians from all over the globe are in touch with each other daily through Internet-mediated forums, newsgroups, listservs, etc, the majority of which are in English. For the time being, at least, the Internet (and by extension online learning) is strongly influenced by the English language.

# CALL 101: Some basics any CALL practitioner needs to know



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## چکیده

مقاله حاضر قرار است اولین مقاله از سلسله مقالاتی باشد که چاپ آن‌ها با موضوع یادگیری زبان به کمک فناوری، از این شماره آغاز می‌شود. هدف از نگارش این مقالات آن است که خوانندگان علاقه‌مند به صورت گام به گام با چگونگی یادگیری زبان از طریق رایانه آشنا شوند. گرچه تصور من این است که خوانندگان حتی با دانش بسیار اندک فناوری می‌توانند از مقالات بهره ببرند، در عین حال سعی کرده‌ام مقالات برای مبتدیان در حیطه فناوری و کسانی که در این زمینه تبحر دارند، هر دو مفید واقع شوند. گرچه این اولین مقاله لزوماً مقدمه‌ای است بر این موضوع و قرار نیست خوانندگان را با کار عملی روبه‌رو کند، در عین حال اعتقاد دارم محتوای مقاله برای همه کاربران مفید خواهد بود. ما بلام بر این نکته تأکید کنم که خوانندگان بهتر است یادگیری در زمینه استفاده از رایانه در یادگیری زبان را از همین اول شروع کنند و لذا این مقاله را در عین سادگی مطالعه نمایند. امیدوارم خوانندگان محتوای فراهم شده را مفید ارزیابی کنند.

کلیدواژه‌ها: آموزش زبان از طریق فن‌آوری، یادگیری و آموزش زبان، کلاس زبان

## Abstract

The present article is intended as the first of a series of articles on Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), hopefully to appear in each new issue of the *Roshd FLT* magazine from now on. The intention is to take interested readers through CALL step by step. Although I assume very little technology knowledge on behalf of the readers, I have tried to make the text useful for newbies and tech-savvy people alike. And while the first articles are necessarily introductory and do not yet involve the reader in much practice, I believe that their contents are nevertheless useful for all CALL practitioners, and would like to urge the readers to start learning about CALL from the beginning rather than the middle, and to therefore read the following article despite its apparent simplicity. I hope you will find it useful.

**Key Words:** Computer-assisted language, Language learning / teaching, language class