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Technology and the 21st Century Grammar Teaching

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Computers in Language Teaching

Computers have caused significant variation to every aspect of education. Learning English as a foreign/second language has also changed a lot due to the development in Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). Many innovations of the digital revolution have influenced the way educators try to teach language. CALL in English language teaching scenario has found its place as a facilitative device and research has suggested that integration of technology can facilitate learning processes (Warschauer&Healey, 1998).

CALL's Success Story

It is also found that CALL has proved to be advantageous in language teaching (Nutta, 1998; Wang & Beasley, 2002). It is significant to note that the developments in technology could meet the challenge posed by the paradigm shifts in language education. Though started as a mode

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of programmed learning of behaviourist approach, CALL applications of the present day can meet the requirements of the 21st century integrative language teaching.

Self-access Facility

One of the conventional rationales for the computer in language learning is the justification that it offers a powerful self-access facility. It can easily generate learner-centered, self-pacing activity. As in other programmed learning packages, CALL can change the proportion of learning from teacher-led to learner-controlled activity. The role of teacher is more of a facilitator of learning situations. Autonomy is fostered by CALL in different ways. By using the computer for the presentation, explanation, and application of grammatical structures, more classroom time could be dedicated to real communication that focuses on expressing meaning and using appropriate grammatical structures to express that meaning. It is possible for CALL to provide rich input in the form of integrated multimedia programs and to provide explicit grammar explanations that can be reviewed after a while when needed (Ewing, 2000).

CALL and Grammar Teaching History

The possibility of using computers in the teaching of grammar has been an important discussion in CALL. Traditionally, computers were considered a good fit for grammar instruction (Levy, 1997; Levy & Stockwell, 2006).

Initial Use of Computers for Language Teaching

Initially, computers were used for teaching languages through grammar translation method. Among the first and most significant applications for the teaching and learning of language at the computer were those used on the Programmed Logic/Learning for Automated Teaching Operations (PLATO) system, developed in 1959 by the University of Illinois. PLATO's computer and its programming language were custom-designed for the purpose of teaching language, as well as a range of other university-wide disciplines. Much of PLATO's first language learning work was done in teaching Russian using grammar translation method, which dominated foreign language teaching from the 1840s to the 1940s. Russian language teaching and learning included grammar explanations, vocabulary drills and other drills and translation tests. Thus, the earliest language learning programmes were strictly linear, requiring each learner to follow the same steps in the same fashion with rewards in the form of points and advancement for correct answers.

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Cognitive Model of Language Learning through CALL

In reaction to the criticism that CALL was limited to mechanical drills and lacked the ability to give learners essential feedback, the early 1990s was characterized by a model that used the computer as stimulus. Here, software followed cognitive model of language learning that aimed to stimulate students' motivation, critical thinking, creativity, and analytical skills rather than merely the achievement of correct answer or the passive comprehension of meaning. A related learning model was the use of computer as a tool providing the means for students to become active learners (Levy, 1997). Software in this category, such as word processor, spelling and grammar checkers, desktop publishing programmes, and concordancers did not supply language-learning activities, but facilitated the students' understanding and manipulation of the target language.

Three Stages

CALL can be divided into three main stages: structural CALL, communicative CALL, and integrative CALL (Warschauer, 2004). Each stage corresponds to technological and pedagogical theories. The history of CALL could go along with the paradigm shifts in language teaching (See Table 1).

TABLE 1

The Three Stages of CALL

Stage	*1970s-1980s: Structural CALL*	*1980s-1990s: Communicative CALL*	*21st Century: Integrative CALL*
Technology	Mainframe	PCs	Multimedia and the Internet
English teaching paradigm	Grammar translation and audio-lingual	Communicative language teaching	Content based, English for Specific Purposes
View of language	Structural (a formal structural system)	Cognitive (a mentally constructed system)	Sociocognitive (developed in social interaction)
Principal use of computer	Drill and practice	Communicative exercises	Authentic discourse
Principle objective	Accuracy	Fluency	Agency

Note. Based on Warschauer (2004)

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It is found that interactive multimedia and web-based instruction of the digital age have generated positive contributions in the teaching and learning of grammar. CALL based activities offer enriched incorporated multimedia grammar contents with clarifications on grammar structures which are accessible to the learners on their own time and space (Baturay et al., 2010). Likewise, computer exercises also facilitate the understanding of complicated concepts in grammar. In addition, current online practice activities allow several tries and shots of answers with instant feedback. These assist the formation and testing of hypotheses about grammatical structures, which is a vital element in the process of learning the grammar of any language. This, consequently, enhances students' ability to notice certain grammatical items in the presented contexts (Sagarra & Zapata, 2008). Noticing items in a language enables learners to construct a relationship between the meanings and the forms of these language items, resulting in learning the grammatical forms (Hedge, 2000). Also, most online activities are capable of making students more involved and engaged in their learning of grammar (Sagarra & Zapata, 2008). This allows students to practice a variety of grammatical items and language features presented to them in interactive activities.

Conclusion

The use of computer is fast developing in language learning. Language educationists have been integrating the use of computer in teaching. Educational software is creatively developed to help teaching and learning of English. However, there are many factors that contribute to the effectiveness of the use of computer in language teaching, for instance, the content, the quality of the design, the interactivity, the skills of the teachers as well as of the students and the language acquisition theory integrated with computer-based teaching and learning. It is best to remember that computer is not a substitution for teachers but rather it is an enabler to help both teachers and students have more opportunities to experience various innovative methods in teaching and learning. Practicing websites' activities and getting immediate feedback push students to think about their answers and lead to a better understanding of grammar rules. It can be concluded that students' abilities to form and test hypotheses is facilitated by the use of technology. This can also

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engage students to learn grammar as well as provide them with interactive practice activities and feedbacks.

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