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A Shift from CALL to MALL?

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Abstract

Technology possesses an ever-changing nature and holds visible effects in the field of education as is the case with many other realms of life. Related with technology in language teaching and learning, it can be easily observed that some acronyms like TELL, CALL, and MALL are broadly used. Out of these three, CALL turns out to be the most known as it has been a term in use as of 1960s and 70s. MALL is a quite novel and popular term and may be traced back to a decade ago, or two decades at most. TELL here can be regarded as an umbrella term for the use of technology in language learning in general. This study aims to discuss the following questions on the link between CALL and MALL: Is MALL replacing CALL? Which term is more popular among researchers? What are their pros and cons? Which one is more practical and advantageous for language learners? Which one is more likely to be involved in the future of language learning and teaching? Are CALL and MALL replacing the live language teacher? By seeking satisfactory answers for the questions, we aim to shed light upon the dichotomy of CALL or MALL and contribute to the existing literature.

Key words: technology, computer-assisted language learning (CALL), mobile-assisted language learning (MALL)

Introduction

Technology goes through an ongoing development process and this constant development trend naturally has its reflections in a number of fields including language learning and teaching. As of early 1980s, the de facto advent of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) became a part of this trend (Chapelle, 2001). Computers constitute potentially the most significant and fruitful product of technology in the realm of education. As the name implies, CALL ushered a new era in language learning. The opportunities provided by computers enabled those who wanted to learn a second/foreign language break dependence on the previous sine-qua-nons like classroom, teacher, course-books, etc. and to study on an autonomous basis.

Over time the early room-size computers were replaced by far smaller ones and with the unprecedented pace of development as of 2000s computers began to appear in even pocket-size. This remarkable physical change has been accompanied by a rapid and drastic change in the systems and software employed in computers. The emergence of Web 2.0 tools,

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in particular, marked the beginning of a new epoch in that it enabled interactive use of computers. The term Web 2.0 was coined by O'reilly (2005) and it

encompasses a variety of different meanings that include an increased emphasis on user generated content, data and content sharing and collaborative effort, together with the use of various kinds of social software, new ways of interacting with web-based applications, and the use of the web as a platform for generating, re-purposing and consuming content. (Franklin & Harmelen, 2007, p. 4.)

This interactive dimension which is an indispensable part of language learning process has brought a number of practical benefits for language learning and teaching. In 1999, Warschauer claimed that the use of computers will not be a luxury but a necessary and readily available part of language learning in the future. Now the elapsed time strongly justifies Warschauer. Indeed, this rapid pace of technological development and its reflections may even imply that Warschauer's foresight was just an underestimation. This point has been elaborated by Kern (2006) with a touch on two chronologically different definitions of CALL by Levy (1997) and Egbert (2005). According to Levy (1997), "CALL means the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning" (p.1) while Egbert (2005) provides the following definition: "CALL means learners learning language in any context with, through, and around computer technologies" (p.4). This chronological comparison makes it clear that the more recent definition does not consider the existence of a computer as essential in the practice of CALL any longer; instead, a broader term computer technologies is preferred. Now a decade has passed since this definition by Egbert (2005) and the practical uses of technology have evolved to a greater extent. From a broader perspective, Bonk (2009, p. 51) mentions ten openers to learning in the 21st century:

Ten openers: (WE-ALL-LEARN)

- (1) Web searching in the world of e-books
- (2) E-learning and blended learning
- (3) Availability of open source and free software
- (4) Leveraged resources and open course ware
- (5) Learning object repositories and portals
- (6) Learner participation in open information communities
- (7) Electronic collaboration
- (8) Alternate reality learning
- (9) Real-time mobility and portability
- (10) Networks of personalised learning

The above points listed by Bonk (2009) indicate that the autonomy dimension is of vital importance in learning in this new century. Under this framework, the opportunities yielded by digital technologies both including and beyond computers are quite significant. Such new perspectives on education gave birth to a new blooming trend in the realm of language learning and teaching: Mobile-assisted Language Learning (MALL). MALL encompasses the use of mobile devices like cell phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), smartphones, pads, and pods for language learning purposes. Especially with the advent of smartphones and interactive mobile 2.0 technologies MALL began to gain a remarkable momentum. Ogata et al. (2010) makes a clear comment as to the borders of MALL by stating: "computer assisted mobile learning uses lightweight devices such as personal digital assistant (PDA), cellular mobile phones, and so on" (p.8). This elaboration obviously excludes even laptops from the coverage of MALL. Accordingly, such developments have led to a CALL



versus MALL dichotomy. The increasing popularity of MALL practices among language teachers and learners and MALL-related research in the academic world has brought the question “What is happening to CALL?” In recent years there have been a number of studies investigating the role of mobile technologies in different aspects of language learning and teaching (e.g. Abbasi&Hashemi, 2013; Baleghizadeh&Oladrostam, 2010; Barrs, 2011; Çakır, 2015; Kétyi, 2013; Mehta, 2012; Muhammed, 2014; Rahimi&Miri, 2014; Rosell-Aguliar, 2014; Saran, Seferoglu&Cagiltay, 2009; Tafazoli& Jam, 2015; Thornton & Houser, 2005; Wu, 2014; Yaman, Şenel&Yeşilel, 2015). In this context, Jarvis and Krashen (2014) question whether the term CALL is obsolete or not and discuss its status in relation to terms like MALL and Technology-enhanced Language Learning (TELL).

In the light of the information provided above, this study aims to present an extensive overview of CALL and MALL in the context of TELL with frequent reference to the existing relevant literature. To this end we seek answers to such questions as the following:

- (1) Is MALL replacing CALL?
- (2) Which term is more popular among researchers?
- (3) What are their pros and cons?
- (4) Which one is more practical and advantageous for language learners?
- (5) Which one is more likely to be involved in the future of language learning and teaching?
- (6) Are CALL and MALL replacing the live language teacher?

Questions Addressed and Discussions

Question 1: Is MALL replacing CALL?

Warschauer (1996) divides the evolution of CALL into three phases: Behaviouristic CALL (1960s-1970s), Communicative CALL (1970s-1980s), and Integrative CALL (1990s-). The phase valid today is Integrative CALL. It is mostly web-based and gives computers and the Internet a facilitator role. As Bax (2003) stresses, CALL has gone through considerable changes over time. With the transfer of computer functions to mobile devices like smartphones and tablets, a new dimension emerged in the field of language teaching and learning: MALL. It can be briefly said that MALL “differs from CALL in its use of personal, portable devices that enable new ways of learning, emphasising continuity or spontaneity of access across different contexts of use” (Kukulka-Hulme & Shields, 2008, p. 273). In the past, mobile devices included cassette players, MP3/4 players, etc. Their functions were rather limited with no internet access. However, with the advent of mobile devices with advanced functions, their broad use in language learning has become viable.

Here is the question: Are these two terms alternatives to each other or complement one another? It is true that CALL undergoes a lot of changes and MALL, as a recent posh term, increasingly gains popularity. However, that does not mean that one is necessarily being replaced by the other. They are not direct alternatives to each other; rather they both aim to help language learners master language skills to a desirable extent via different ways and complement each other. A student can make use of both together. Outside school or home mobile devices can be utilized and at school or home computers and the Internet can be benefited from for language learning purposes. If we let CALL disappear, the use of merely

mobile devices will not yield effective results on every occasion because of their certain limitations (see Question 3 below). Likewise, if we disregard MALL, the potential mobility and accordingly omnipresence of language learning will be eliminated, which is not something desirable on the part of learners.

Question 2: Which term is more popular among researchers?

A simple search for the term ‘Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL)’ on Google Scholar yields approximately 16600 results while search for the term ‘Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) yields 1580 results (<https://scholar.google.com.tr>). The searches for the two terms are limited to the studies indexed as of 2010. As for the studies indexed as of 2016, the approximate result for CALL turns out to be 4840 and it appears to be 253 for MALL. These figures clearly show that CALL-related studies hold an overwhelming superiority over MALL-related ones in terms of quantity in the literature. That is, CALL, the origins of which date back to a few decades ago, can be regarded as a well-established dimension in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). There are even some internationally renowned journals like Computer Assisted Language Learning, CALICO Journal, CALL-EJ, ReCALL Journal, and EUROCALL Review that merely focus on CALL. On the other hand, MALL is a quite new term in the field and has gained a considerable amount of interest among language learners and teachers. Therefore, it is likely to gain more popularity among ELT researchers in the coming years.

Question 3: What are their pros and cons?

Benefits promised by CALL can be summarized as follows:

- increased learner autonomy
- omnipresent (ubiquitous) learning
- higher motivation for digital natives
- individualized learning, self-paced learning
- immediate feedback and error correction
- unlimited learning resources (e-books, podcasts, videos, websites, etc.)
- guided and repetitive practice (as many times as learners wish)
- written (mostly) and spoken interaction with native speakers of English or other language learners (e.g. social networking, Skype)

Disadvantages that may be brought by CALL can be summarized as follows:

- access to computers and internet (digital divide at school or home)
- poor technology training in language teacher education (Dudeney&Hockly, 2007; Egbert et al., 2002)
- teachers’ resistance to CALL
- distracting elements
- direct but inadequate feedback
- unexpected learning problems
- feeling of artificiality

As for MALL, all of the pros and cons listed above concerning CALL can be uttered in relation with MALL as well. Two more advantages can be added for mobile devices: smaller size and better portability. However, their small and limited screen and limited data storage can be deemed as a remarkable disadvantage. Furthermore, smartphones appear to be one of the most popular cheating tools in recent years.

Question 4: Which one is more practical and advantageous for language learners?

There are a number of resources and tools on the Internet that may offer invaluable contributions to the learning process of language learners. All of the language skills including main and sub-ones can be fostered through effective use of these resources and tools. The most disadvantaged skill here is speaking; however, even for it there are tools like Skype and Voxopop. These rich opportunities are mostly accessible through both computers and mobile devices. At this point, the above-listed advantages and disadvantages of these two should be looked at. If a tool or website will be utilized on the bus to school, a mobile device like a tablet or smartphone appears to be more practical. Likewise, if an unknown lexical item is the case in the classroom, dictionary apps on smartphones can be quickly looked up. Similarly, while traveling, in order to boost exposure to the target language podcasts or English songs can be listened to via an MP3/4 player or a smartphone. MALL turns out to be cut out for such scenarios. Nevertheless, if school offers computer laboratories for students or learner wants to further study on English independently at home, CALL appears more preferable. It is apparent that CALL is more advantageous for certain purposes while MALL is more practical for other purposes. Accordingly, learners should make use of the opportunities offered by both eclectically.

Question 5: Which one is more likely to be involved in the future of language learning and teaching?

It is clear that both will maintain their popular status in the future. However, the increasing mobility of human beings may cause them to need mobile opportunities more. Therefore, new mobile devices and new mobile software are likely to be a bit more popular among language learners than computer technologies. To give a simple example, language learners are likely to prefer mobile dictionary apps instead of printed or computer-based dictionaries. Rather than carrying bulky dictionaries or laptops, language learners hold the opportunity to enjoy easily portable dictionaries with audio functions on mobile devices. This is not to say that these two popular trends will progress in totally different directions. They are bound to each other and their progress and journey in the educational realm will go hand in hand. As the tools and applications used in mobile devices like smartphones and tablets are mostly based on web technologies, progress in mobile technologies appears to be dependent on progress in computer technologies. For instance, the popular dictionary application ‘Tureng’ is of web origin and is now broadly used on smartphones by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Turkey.

Question 6: Are CALL and MALL replacing the live language teacher?

No one can claim that technology should not have a place in language teaching and learning processes. Of course, the fruits yielded by technology promise invaluable benefits for

language teachers and learners and the realm of ELT has experienced these fruits under the titles of CALL and MALL. However, the broad integration of such technology into language education brings a key question into mind: Is the live language teacher being replaced? For years, the field of translation studies asks whether machine translation will dominate the field one day. Up to now, tools like Trados, Across, and Google Translate have turned out to be facilitating for translators but they have not been able to replace the human translator. Similarly, we believe that the existing Web 2.0 and Mobile 2.0 technologies and their future versions will maintain their facilitator status but will not be able to eliminate the human factor. Language itself is something that mostly involves communication in flesh and blood. Therefore, the role of the live language teacher cannot be denied. Even in distance language education, asynchronous sessions are supported by synchronous ones in order to enhance instant student-teacher and student-student interaction because "...the key to successful use of technology in language teaching lies not in hardware or software but in 'humanware'—our human capacity as teachers to plan, design and implement effective educational activity" (Warschauer&Meskill, 2000, p. 316).

Well-designed Web 2.0 and Mobile 2.0 applications can provide to-the-point feedback about the performance of the learner on a specific exercise; however, it can hardly reach the efficacy level of the face-to-face feedback offered by the live language teacher. "There is currently no definitive research to indicate that students will acquire a second language effectively through technology without interaction with and guidance from a qualified language teacher" (ACTFL, 2012, paragraph 3). In addition, language teachers' key role in the selection of appropriate Web 2.0 and Mobile 2.0 tools should not be disregarded. Technology surely fosters learner autonomy but technology-enhanced language learning process requires a meticulous guidance and supervision aspect which can be best provided by live language teachers.

Conclusion

In this study, we have discussed the issue of CALL-MALL dichotomy by trying to provide answers to six key questions. Technology undertakes a prominent role in almost every bit of life and the field of language teaching and learning receives its share as well. TELL and, as its most popular sub-terms, CALL and MALL now occupy a remarkable position accordingly. Nevertheless, as Schrum (2005) highlights, we should not have over-expectations from technology in education:

We're all familiar with the extravagant promises of technology: It will make our students smarter -- and it will do it faster and cheaper than ever before. Moreover, the promise suggests, this miracle will occur almost by osmosis. We need only place a computer in a room, stand back, and watch the magic take place. If only life were that simple and learning that easy! (paragraph 2)

Technology should not be deemed as "a magic bullet to solve educational problems, but rather as a powerful tool that can have both positive and negative impact, and that must be carefully exploited" (Warschauer, 2009, p. xx). At this point, the important role of the language teacher becomes noteworthy. Opportunities offered by technology should be carefully handled and the use of CALL or MALL should be carefully guided by language teachers so that the learning process attains the pre-set educational goals.



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