**LECTURE SIX**

**CALL Research: Trends and Issues**

1. **Early Research and Interests**

The focus of CALL research is changing quickly because of the everyday new technologies introduced to the world. This rapid change has influenced SLA theory, practice and research. Examples of studies that represent declining interests are those that query

* The need of computers in the classroom,
* The comparison between CALL and traditional learning in terms of effectiveness , and
* Students’ ability to access technology.

In other words, the foci of many early studies were on quantitative and qualitative justifications of CALL. In these studies, the aim was to test the computer effectiveness in teaching a discrete set of knowledge in comparison with a traditional class that represents the control group. This kind of research is irrelevant these days since the learners’ and teachers’ technology literacy is undebatable, as it is the computers’ appropriateness for accommodating different learning styles. This kind of research is no longer frequent since the use of computers in classrooms has been perceived as complementary to classroom teaching.

1. **Recent Research and Interests**

Research instead shifted to other areas. It is directed into how computers should be best used and for what purposes. The computer is not only a subject of research, but it became an important tool to conduct research with a range of possible uses including presenting and analyzing statistical data, collecting data (creating and distributing surveys), and providing feedback (e.g. a research aimed to investigate how and when students decided to accept offered grammar corrections) (Beatty, 2010).

The pace of change in computer technology has led to an extensive duplication of efforts to report the research and make it reach its intended audience before it became out of data or before other improvements in the technology used would appear. This duplication of research is affected also by the modern extensive use of personal computers which necessitates searching learners’ use of technology outside class and how they transfer the skills acquired into their learning. For example, the use of electronic games would lead researchers to ask the following questions:

* What kind of language skills learners acquire to play a particular game?
* Do they transfer these skills to their learning atmospheres?
* Do these games make learners’ less tolerant of educational applications that do not match the computer’s game’s existing presentation of information?
* Do they acquire in these virtual environments, the necessary social competencies needed for real communication?
* Are these environments safe for them?

The inclusion of computer entertainment applications (like games) in education became known as *edutainment*. In most cases, the educational objectives are disguised under game objectives (Beatty, 2010).

Reviewing studies recently published in journals, it has been noticed that they varied in interest. Some of them focused on the different language skills: listening, speaking, writing and reading, vocabulary, grammar, and translation. Writing has gained much of the CALL research regarding its productivity nature; it is easy to report their output on a computer. Speaking is measured through the use of software programs. The latter ask learners to repeat words and sentences to be measured against model pronunciation in a graphic way. However, the quality of the recording material, the background noise, and the specification of speech points that should be modified remained major shortcomings of these software programs. Listening and reading are dealt with through measuring comprehension. However, CALL instruction could promote these four skills through providing platforms for collaboration and cooperation which allow interaction with other users of the language.

Grammar checkers are commonly used in CALL to verify grammar acquisition. However, their evaluation revealed their inadequacy or indifference from other traditional tools used in the classroom. Translation in CALL is referred to as machine translation (MT) programs. The latter were criticized for their inadequacy to deal with natural languages. In other words, they offer low-quality translations; long passages often result in senseless text.

Most of CALL studies addressed issues of developing or creating learning materials, followed by others that dealt with evaluating, but none took the risk of predicting the future of CALL. Recent research shifted to deal more with Internet-based tools or platforms as forums, blogs… rather than CDROMs, DVDs… Emphasis today is shifting to blended learning, online applications, social networking sites and other tools that facilitate communication and language acquisition, besides interest in establishing CALL principles (as the focus on content rather than technology), Models [e.g. that of Gruba, 2006 called End-user development (EUD)], teachers’ and students’ attitudes towards CALL instruction and the extent to which these attitudes are reflected in their learning/ teaching process. The subjects with whom much of CALL research was conducted are university students because university teachers conduct research as part of their academic work (Beatty, 2010).

With the evolution of social media which can be defined to

involve the messy, unpredictable use of human language for motivated, authentic purposes, a phenomenon that does not lend itself to laboratory controls. Social media involve evolving forms of human interaction, forms of interaction that require new approaches to understanding language learning and teaching along with research perspectives, approaches and techniques that serve in building such understanding.

(Mestill and Quah, 2013. p.41).

CALL research turned to focus on three main trends: focus on the online environment, focus on the socio/affective outcomes, and focus on pedagogy.

**a/ The online environment;** research within this trend focus on the online environment. i.e on the different online tools and platforms such as Wiki, Blogs… in an attempt to find out what the design of these online tools afford for language learning and teaching, and how it affects language/ culture learning of those who take part in the online communicative exchanges. Social spaces, unlike traditional CALL, afford interactive possibilities that are social, authentic and complex.

**b/ The socio-affective dimensions;** this category of research concentrates on learners’ reactions and reflections in terms of community building, learner L2 identity construction, learner confidence…

**c/ Pedagogical processes;** the concerns of language education researchers broadened with the vast evolvement of online communication tools and practices. They moved to focus on blended and online learning perceiving synchronous and asynchronous interaction and communication as valuable and authentic. However, because social media are relatively new, research within this trend centered around publishing attempts of integrating different social media tools into classroom pedagogy. Researchers focus on pedagogical strategies, task design, teacher guidance and practices, curricular coherence, and learner training that allow for a successful integration of a particular social media tool, generally, and the online telecollaboration, particularly (Mestill and Quah, 2013).

Telecollaboration or Online intercultural exchange can take place between classes learning the languages of each other, or between two or more classes using a lingua franca (O’Dowd, 2011; Guth et. al. 2012). O’Dowd (2016) claimed that there is a consensus among researchers in the field that telecollaboration should be integrated into classroom context to include learners’ reflection and interpretation together with teacher’s support and guidance. Hence, although initial projects of telecollaboration were additional activities to which learners’ may not give enough attention and importance, “most telecollaborative activity in recent years has taken a blended approach where learners’ online interactions and their reactions to this interaction has been discussed, analyzed and framed with the help of a languacultural expert (i.e. their teacher)” (O’Dowd, 2016 p.07).

**References**

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