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## COMPUTER – ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING (CALL): ITS IMPLICATION FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH GRAMMAR

Nguyen Thi Le Phi

Lecturer of English at Ho Chi Minh City University of Natural Resources and Environment,  
Vietnam

Email: [ntlphi@hcmunre.edu.vn](mailto:ntlphi@hcmunre.edu.vn)



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### Abstract

Teaching grammar provides the foundational knowledge for other language abilities to be built upon. With that being said, students usually find it difficult to engage in grammar classes due to its technical nature. The rise in technological advance has allowed for more engaging approaches to teaching grammar in a traditional classroom. This article will discuss 2 core approaches in grammar presentation and their applicability to Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL). A teaching/learning tool (e.g., <http://www.manythings.org>) will be introduced and examined. A description and evaluation of the website mentioned will come after that. Finally, an example lesson plan for teaching grammar at the pre-Intermediate level, integrating CALL principles/elements, will be presented.

Key words: CALL, grammar, Website, teaching, learning, language

## I. INTRODUCTION

Having been teaching English for several years, I realize the real problems that produce unsatisfying results in language teaching and learning. Big classes with poor – equipped settings, only black board, chalk and the teacher all of which are just suitable for the teacher to employ traditional method of teaching, which is teacher – centered classroom. Of course, there are many other reasons having a part in producing the learners' outcome but the above-mentioned elements play an important role in the process of language teaching and learning. I haven't been much satisfied with my job until the recent years when Technology did exist in my classrooms with the support of the computer and the Internet technology. We are now living in the time of science and technology, especially the informatics

technology, why don't we take full advantage of it as a tool in education. Personally, as a language teacher, I appreciate much the value of Computer – Assisted Language Learning (CALL) which not only helps me improve my lesson plans but motivates my students and helps to ensure effective learning in them as well.

Learning or acquiring a language is a process in which the learners should start at "an early age by picking the language up naturally in the rich cultural and linguistic environment they were born or grew up" (ZhonggangGao, 2001). Unluckily, those who learn English as a foreign language in non – English – speaking countries don't have such an environment. What they have is just the materials and non – native – teachers with lots of grammar rules which are found boring, hard to remember and uninteresting to the learners so what they have learnt at school

seems to be different from reality. This is a big problem to most of language learners when they have to face up to reality. However, since CALL came into existence, it partly helps find a solution to the problem. The benefits that CALL brings to us is to “offer a real context, authenticity and topicality of materials and a cross – cultural perspective” (Kangro, 2004). But computer is just a computer, it is considered as a tool, an aid in the language teaching and learning, so it is the teachers who have to know how to make use and control it with suitable pedagogical methods in order to have a more and more interesting lesson, especially for grammar instructions.

## II. Literature Review

In my opinion, grammar is a really necessary area that needs to be focused besides the four skills Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing, because, according to Erdem and Basaran (2010, as cited in Eyup, 2012), success cannot be achieved through teaching of language skills without grammar. With a profound knowledge of grammar, language learners can find it more easy to understand the structures of the target language and as a result they have more chances to produce correct output. During a long time in the past there have been many studies about how to teach grammar the most effectively, from teacher – centred instruction to communicative approach all of which have their own strong and weak points. I will make some brief literature review of previous researches on this topic so as to have a better idea of this standpoint.

Firstly, it is important to define the term “grammar”. Andrew, Torgerson, Beverton, Freeman, Locke, Low, Robinson and Zhu in their article (2006) defined grammar as the study of syntax (word order), clause and phrase structure, and the classification of parts of speech. I usually compare the grammar lesson as a cooking class in which the students are given instructions of how to make a course or dish and before the dish is ready, they have to prepare some ingredients all of which are cooked with a standard recipe without which the dish may be spoiled. This process is like the way we teach students to recognize the parts of speech (compared with the ingredients) and then combine

them to make a complete meaningful statements or expressions using the grammar rules. The problem here is how to bring these rules to the learners without making them feel bored and find hard to remember.

According to Widodo (2006), there are two core approaches in grammar presentation: Deductive and Inductive approach.

- Deductive approach: a deductive approach is derived from the notion that deductive reasoning works from the general to the specific. In this case, rules, principles, concepts, or theories are presented first, and then their applications are treated. In conclusion, when we use deduction, we reason from general to specific principles

- Inductive approach: an inductive approach comes from inductive reasoning stating that a reasoning progression proceeds from particulars (that is, observations, measurements, or data) to generalities (for example, rules, laws, concepts or theories) (Felder & Henriques, 1995, as cited in Widodo, 2006). In short, when we use induction, we observe a number of specific instances and from them infer a general principle or concept.

The first approach seems to fit the traditional way of teaching grammar in which learners are taught rules and then they apply these rules while the second doesn't have the rule explanation at the beginning but require the learners to discover the generalizations after being exposed to the examples. So I think the second approach is more appealing because it gives learners chances to involve in the process of learning; they don't just sit passively listening to the teachers. These two approaches have been used for a long time and have brought some certain good results but we have to acknowledge that a learner who is good at grammar and always gets good marks on exams also find quite confused and uncomfortable when he/she has to communicate with native speakers since the traditional way of teaching grammar doesn't give them chances to be in real contexts.

In order to motivate the learners, teachers should integrate technology in his or her approach of teaching and Computer – assisted teaching is

what language teachers should employ because “it is a method of using computers in the educational process in order to ensure that student identify his/her deficiencies and performance by receiving feedbacks” (Baki, 2002, as cited in Eyup 2012). By using this, teachers can make conventional method more interesting and effective. Computers and Internet are two necessities to be integrated because computers with power point program will help teachers have a more interesting lesson plan with graphics, sounds and animation all of which make the material clear and interesting (Abuseileek & Rabab’ah, 2007). And Internet has given many benefits not only to teachers but learners as well. Son (2008) in his article stated that “Internet provides language teachers with network – based teaching environments in which they can create meaningful tasks and use various materials for language learners”. It is also believed that Internet plays an important role in the process of language learning since the learners find chances for improvement in a CALL environment which are unavailable in traditional L2 classroom. Learners can receive immediate feedback about their answers and correct their errors from the system. CALL also allows each student to work at his own pace (Ewing 2000, as cited in AbuSeileek & Rabab’ah 2007)

Nuta (2001, as cited in Naba’h 2012) used to conduct a study comparing the computer – based grammar instruction and the teacher – directed grammar instruction. The results showed that the computer – based students scored significantly higher. This means that computer – based instruction can be an effective method of teaching L2 grammar because

“the unique property of the computer as a medium for education is its ability to interact with the student. Books and tape recordings can tell a student what the rules are and what the right solutions are, but they cannot analyse the specific mistake the student has made and react in a manner which leads him not only to correct his mistake, but also to understand the principles behind the correct solution” (Nelson, Ward, and Kaplow 1976)

Another statement which proves that computer – based instruction predominates over

traditional language teaching is by Ellis (2003) who claimed that traditional language teaching can demotivate the learners while communicative approach with CALL can provide learners with many benefits. CALL programmers design many computer games, animated graphics and problem – solving techniques which give grammar teaching a new face and make it become a more interesting process.

### III. Description

I used to be so confused with many stuffs on the web pages and sometimes I have been dazzled with them too. In order to choose a suitable link or an activity for an effective lesson plan, I have to spend much time and I usually was not happy until I found out this Website “Interesting Things for ESL/EFL Students (Fun English Study)” (<http://www.manythings.org/>) because in this website I can find some activities appropriate for me to integrate in my lesson plans. Moreover, I think this website suits my students’ various levels. It quite attracts me much with the exercises/activities about the four skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing), especially the exercises about sentence patterns, word order.

This is a Website for studying English as a second language so there are many computer – assisted language learning activities for the four skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) and other two knowledge areas: Grammar and Vocabulary. Furthermore, this site is non – commercial and has no advertisements. So I think it is quite good for the purpose of teaching and learning second languages.

In the section of Vocabulary, the drop – down menu gives the learners many choices with different kinds of games or activities (Crossword Puzzles, Matching Quizzes, Games With Pictures, ...) grouped in certain topics and levels

In the section of Reading, the Website provides learners with many texts adapted from material produced by the Voice Of America (VOA). These texts are accompanied with MP3 files available for download process. Learners can read the texts while listening to the voice from MP3 files. Besides that, the VOA special English Videos (with

Text)” available on the site furnish learners with many links accessing to many videos selected from VOA each of which has the text displayed as “subtitles” scrolling up slowly enough for the learners to get the information. There is also a “10 – minute Daily News” updated every day to give learners more chances to be in authentic environment.

In the section of Grammar, web users are provided with many kinds of activities for practice (Flash Quizzes, English grammar Quizzes, Random Sentences, Scrambled Sentences, Search VOA Sentences, Bilingual Sentences Pairs, English Sentences With Audio). Besides, “Grammar” in *List of menu pages* also links the web users to another website which is Activities For ESL Students (a4esl.org) where there are many quizzes, tests, exercises and puzzles to help the web users learn English as a second language.

There are a lot of other wonderful things worth clicking your mouse to find out fantastic activities using CALL environment where activities, games and exercises about Listening, Vocabulary, Reading, and Grammar are well combined. With this kind of activity the web users can learn and practice many things, from Vocabulary to Grammar and Listening as well as Reading.

#### **IV. Evaluation**

##### **1. Pedagogical aspects**

Pedagogically, this is quite an appropriate website for language learners to visit because firstly, it is free, non – commercial and has no advertising with clear aim. Secondly, the website provides learners with many kinds of games, exercises and activities in not only the four skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) but also in Grammar and Vocabulary with many different topics involving authenticity and cultural aspects. For example, in Reading skill, learners are given some Reading English signs in which they reveal the meaningful pictures in some circumstances. Or in the section of Vocabulary, there is an exercise about vocabulary for university students. Most of the material is culturally authentic with accurate and useful information taken from VOA and the exercises and

games are designed to aim at many different levels of proficiency with a lot of supplemental individual skills focused separately depending on learners’ goals.

This website is really suitable for learners to be autonomous in their learning and then teachers become facilitators who may just explain how to use the software to those being at the beginning level. In Grammar section, learners can study by themselves with “Random Sentences” and “Sentence Machine” with various randomly – generated sentences. Even though the meaning of these sentences may be funny or may not always make sense, learners can also learn many other things from them. Most of the on – screen instructions are clear, comprehensive and easy to follow. Besides, the site also contains links to other website and these links are really valuable additions. For example, in Grammar section, there is a link to another website, *Activities for ESL/EFL students* (a4esl.org) where there are a lot of good exercises on grammar available.

However, there are still some weak points in this website which need to be improved. The homepage is rather simply designed having no colours or pictures so it is hard to attract young learners. The level of difficulty varies from low to high level but these levels are not grouped separately but set in a jumble and especially in Grammar section, in most of the activities, the grammar points are not classified by types such as Tense, Conditional sentences, Passive voice,.. but they are classified by the kind of exercise such as Random sentences, Scrambled sentences,... This way will cause some problems for the teachers to use the site because in an activity there appears many grammar points: tenses, word form, verb form. If the software cannot be modified, it is hard to be applied unless it is used in consolidating or review the knowledge.

With some exercises, the error handling is not very helpful or useful because of the way it gives feedback. For example, in “Scrambled sentences” exercise, the feedback includes only one word “Wrong” with no given answer or explanation. Although learners have chance to do the exercise again, they really need answers anyway; also in this

kind of exercise, learners are asked to put the words in correct order to have some proverbs and again there is no given answer. If there are answers available, learners can learn many new proverbs.

**2. Technical aspects**

This website is easy to access and quick to download, also it is easy to navigate through the program. The students are able to run and exit the program easily. The icons that are used to assist navigation are clear and intelligible. The screen is clearly designed. The methods for student input are effectively employed, learners can do the exercises in many ways, by either clicking mouse, typing the answers or matching. In Listening and Speaking section, the program includes sound recordings with a good mix of male and female voices of standard voice from the Voice of America. The audio quality is good. Another strong point in this website is that it has many links to other ESL/EFL websites. However, the screen displays are not very effective in some kinds of exercises, for example, with games about Vocabulary, the pictures are not beautiful, the scale of graphics are not appropriate enough to attract the young learners. Another weak point of this website is that in Cross Word Puzzles for Studying English Vocabulary, Java is required so this program will not work for someone. Moreover, online help in this case is not available. I think there should be a link or a direction for the users to download the wanted software to make the program active.

In short, I think this website is good for language teaching and learning in all four skills and

also in Grammar and Vocabulary, especially for consolidating the knowledge because most of the activities are designed in the form of general knowledge

**V. Integration**

An activity in Grammar section will be integrated in my lesson plan for a period of teaching Grammar to students at Pre-Intermediate level.

**LESSON OVERVIEW**

- Course: English Grammar
- Number of students: 25
- Level: Pre-Intermediate
- Topic of lesson: Sentence Pattern
- Objective: After the lesson, the students can create their own sentences using the sentence patterns
- Preparation:
  - \* Hardware: laptop, projector
  - \* Software: power point, games/exercises on the Internet
  - \* Others: flash cards, blackboard, chalk, microphone.
- Procedure:

Before this period, the students were already taught the five sentence patterns, and they come to this period in 45 minutes for practice what they have learnt.

STAGES	TIME	TEACHER	STUDENTS
1	5 minutes	Teacher gets access to Website ( <a href="http://www.manythings.org/rs/sv.html">http://www.manythings.org/rs/sv.html</a> ) and asks students to read aloud the computer – made sentences in the part of <i>Fun With Randomly – Generated Sentences</i> which is part of <i>Interesting Things For ESL Students</i> . (This process is aimed to review the knowledge they have learnt about sentence patterns)	Students will take turn to read aloud the sentences.
	5 minutes	With ppt presentation, the teacher shows some sentences on the slide and asks the students to recognize which pattern(s) these sentences belong to.	Students read aloud the sentences, analyse them and decide if

			they are pattern 1,2,3,4 or 5
2	10 minutes	Teacher gives students the flash cards on which there are words used in the exercise <i>Unscramble These Proverbs</i> , a part of <i>Scrambled Sentences for ESL Students</i> to make sure they can understand the meaning as well as recognize the part of speech of these words. On the board teacher draws a table with many columns each of which is for one part of speech.	Students go to the board and stick the words in the right column.
3	10 minutes	Teacher gets access to Website ( <a href="http://a4esl.org/q/j/ck/wo-proverbs.html">http://a4esl.org/q/j/ck/wo-proverbs.html</a> ) and asks the students to start doing the exercise	Students do the exercise.
4	10 minutes	Teacher chooses another exercise ( <i>Robotic Milking</i> , a part of <i>Scrambled Sentences for ESL Students</i> ) for the students to continue with.	Students do the exercise.
5	5 minutes	Teachers asks the students to create their own sentences using the sentence patterns they have learnt	Students practise making sentences

**VI. Conclusion**

Learning a second language or a foreign language in the time of informatics technology is really advantageous because language learners have many chances to contact authentic environment. This is clearly demonstrated in learning speaking, listening skill and vocabulary with CALL. Many teachers think that CALL only helps much in those skills except Grammar area. They always think grammar translation is the best method for grammar instruction but I don't think so. I think we should look at this problem with new eyes. Teachers who teach grammar or students who learn grammar in CALL environment with online exercises available on websites will find it more interesting than traditional method. Teachers should have positive attitudes towards technology, an important factor in a language classroom. Teachers should be well trained in CALL to meet the learners' needs. In brief, CALL does give us many benefits and if it works well or not in language teaching process depends on how teachers combine well technology and pedagogy.

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**BRIEF AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF CORRESPONDING  
AUTHOR**

Name:	<b>Nguyen Thi Le Phi</b>
Academic degree:	<b>MA in TESOL</b>
Workplace:	<b>Ho Chi Minh City University of Natural Resources and Environment, Vietnam</b>
Title:	<b>Lecturer</b>
Phone number:	<b>+84918142260</b>
Email address:	<b>ntlphi@hcmunre.edu.vn</b>