



## CALL in teaching English to young learners

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### Abstract

The article focuses on the description of both theory and practice of computer assisted language learning (CALL) in the teaching of young learners of English. Firstly, the reasons for using CALL in the teaching of English to young learners are discussed. Secondly, benefits and pitfalls of multimedia in English language classes are outlined and finally, model activities and other useful sources are demonstrated.

### Keywords

Computer assisted language learning; young learners; English; multimedia.

### Introduction

Computer assisted language learning (CALL) is one of many approaches used in English language teaching (ELT). In fact, it is a blended part of traditional, face-to-face teaching (cf. Veselá, 2012) since the traditional tuition cannot be replaced just with e-schooling, particularly as far as the young learners are concerned. As with other teaching approaches, CALL should always be applied purposefully and effectively to meet the teaching objectives of an English lesson and students' needs.

Nowadays young learners cannot imagine being deprived of using information and communication technologies (ICT), such as a computer. For them ICT are as natural as breathing. As Veselá (2012, p. 83) says:

*CALL is ubiquitous and unavoidable, just as new technologies are. Using technologies in teaching/learning is a matter of fact despite the complaints of teachers about insufficiently equipped classrooms, the speed of Internet connections, the lack of resources for CALL – and on contrary too many resources of various value, which are difficult to sort out, time-consumingness ...*

Teachers of English attempt to implement CALL in their teaching; they involve technologies in their teaching in order to make students' learning more effective and motivating (Černá, 2007; Yang, 2001; Young, 2003). This is particularly true for the teachers who are involved in teaching young learners that still need a higher support for their learning and learn best from doing



things through play and action in a warm and engaging environment where they feel safe (cf. Harmer, 2012). These teachers employ the so-called integrative CALL (see Chap. 2 for more information), which exploits multimedia<sup>1</sup> and the Internet as the main technologies for ELT (Warschauer, 2000). Among the most common means of technologies used in the ELT classrooms are the following ones<sup>2</sup>:

- interactive whiteboards (IWB);
- CD ROMs, DVDs, videos, or websites sites ;
- online reference tools, e.g. online dictionaries or wikis;
- e-mail, and Skype.

In addition, multimedia can be divided into linear (e.g. an e-book) or non-linear (e.g. a video game or a self-paced eLearning course). The users of linear media usually have no control of the multimedia content. They are only passive receivers. However, the users of non-linear multimedia are able to interact with the content. It is a two-way communication then.

Benefits and pitfalls of using multimedia to young learners of English

Multimedia are undoubtedly important for ELT because it is known that they concurrently affect more senses at one time. This is not a new finding since this idea was already promoted by great teacher of nations - Jan Amos Komenský (1958) in the 17th century who insisted on presenting teaching matter to as many senses as possible. Thus, multimedia should be an inseparable part of ELT in order to facilitate ELT and help with the acquisition of second language learning. At present multimedia is a common teaching resource, aid or tool in ELT classes for the following reasons:

- they affect more senses (Dale's Cone of Experience, 1946);
- they are modern/fashionable;
- they are up-to-date; they can be usually easily modified;
- they are user-friendly;
- they are relatively inexpensive;

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<sup>1</sup> Multimedia is characterized as a combination of text, audio, still images, animation, video, or interactivity content forms delivered by a computer (Vaughan, 1993; Dostál, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Frydrychová Klímová (2014) performed a survey among the Slovak teachers of English in Nitra region in autumn 2013 and she discovered that most of the teachers (67%) used web pages in their teaching. Six respondents (55%) stated using CD ROMs; three people (27%) an interactive board; two respondents (18%) video and the same number (18%) DVDs.



- they are eye-catching/appealing to students;
- they can help students develop real-life communication;
- they can help students develop four basic language skills, grammar, realia and intercultural communication;
- they can help students develop their remembering and thinking skills;
- they expose students to authentic English;
- they can help students develop cooperative and collaborative skills;
- they enable both students and teachers an easier access to authentic materials;
- they can support different learning styles;
- they are stimulating; and
- simply, they are ubiquitous.

A decade ago most of these teachers were afraid of using any kind of ICT (Poulová & Černá, 2011), but thanks to the benefits listed above and thanks to the school possibilities to buy hardware, teachers are able and want to implement multimedia in their ELT classes. Furthermore, most of the teachers use multimedia at least once a week. As for the timing, probably the most effective time for using multimedia in the ELT classes seems to be between 5-15 minutes. And during these lessons teachers most often exploit different websites and CD ROMs (for more information see Frydrychová Klímová, 2014).

Although multimedia have a positive effect on the development of L2 language acquisition (Sperling, Seyedmonic, Aleksic & Meadows (2003), they must be carefully chosen to suit a particular teaching situation and to meet specific needs of students because not all kinds of multimedia are relevant for teaching or learning situations (Mayer & Moreno, 2002). In addition, if teachers want to use some specific websites, they should evaluate them thoroughly in advance. See the following evaluation documents *Criteria for evaluating web sites* (2008) or Kapoun (1998).

### **Model activities/ case studies**

This section describes two examples of using CALL in the teaching of English to young learners. The first example is an activity done with the help of multimedia and it is a part of an English lesson. The second example is a description of a year-long project, which could inspire other teachers of English in their work.

## Example 1

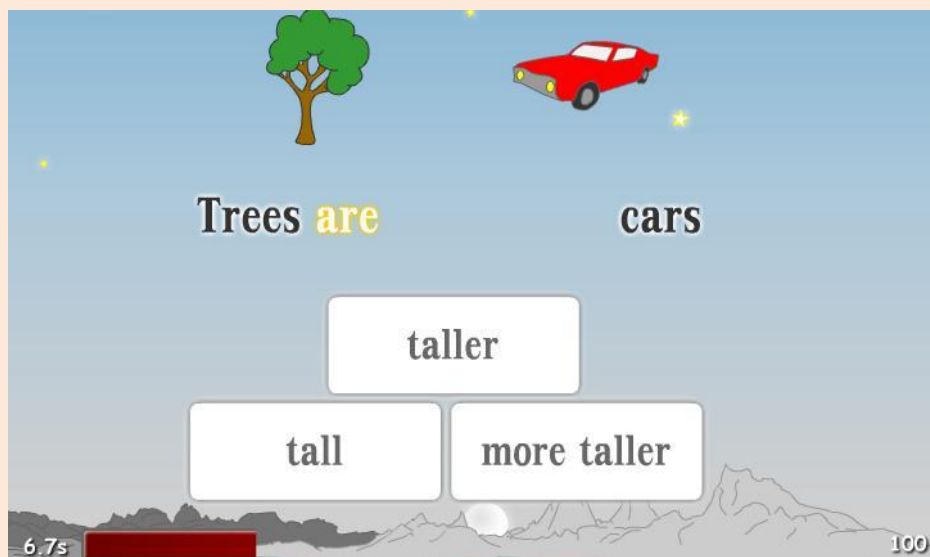
### Online game – Practicing comparatives

**Author:** Ladislav Pongracz

**Lesson Objective:** to review and practise comparatives.

#### Role of media:

We use an online game where students get instant feedback, they get points (or lose points) and if they are good enough, they can become one of the best players in the world as there are children from different countries playing this game.



**Target group:** age: 9 – 12; level: A1-A2.

**Equipment and materials:** a computer, the Internet, a data projector or an interactive whiteboard, a wireless mouse.

**Setting:** This short activity can be used as a revision in a classroom at the end of a lesson. The number of participants can be 1-15.

**Timing:** about 10 – 15 minutes.

#### Task description

This short activity is very helpful when you need to review and practise comparatives, sentence construction and also subject verb agreement in such sentences. Students are shown different sentences with a missing word and they have to choose the correct word/phrase out of three options. In some sentences

there are two or more missing words/phrases. Students share the wireless mouse and play the game together as a group. As they play it, they help each other – better students support weaker ones. If they click on an incorrect word/phrase, they lose points, but they can continue playing the game. The amount of points and remaining time is visible at the bottom of the screen. The game finishes as soon as they run out of time.

Most of these young children like computer games and are motivated by earning points.

Source: <http://gamestolearnenglish.com/compare/>.

### Example 2

The project called *On-line teaching of English language at elementary schools in the Czech Republic* ran from November 2011 till December 2012. At six elementary schools located in the city of Hradec Králové and in Hradec Králové region of the Czech Republic, teachers of English introduced in their conversation classes videoconferences with teachers from abroad, in this case from the Philippines. The age of pupils spanned from the year of 9 to 15, from the fourth up to ninth grades. These videoconferences were run via Skype. The provider and creator of the web application was company OPEN-IT (2011). The whole project was financed by the European Social Fund and from the budget of the Czech Republic. Also four teachers of English from the Department of Applied Linguistics of the Faculty of Informatics and Management in Hradec Králové participated in the project as professional advisors, coaches and creators of methodological worksheets that were used during the English conversation classes by the Philippine teachers. The English conversation classes were held once in two weeks for 45 minutes (regular duration of English classes in the Czech Republic). The topics of their conversation classes were varied, for example:

- *Introducing oneself*
- *Things around us*
- *Family*
- *Seasons of the year*
- *Christmas*
- *Culture*
- *Environment .....*

During the English conversation classes pupils were sitting in different classes, computer laboratories or in school corridors and working in groups of 3-4 at one laptop. All the technical equipment for learning English via Skype, including the portable computers, was financed from the project. Students were

communicating with the Philippine teachers or were doing different interactive activities with one another. Most often four Philippine teachers entered the conversation classes in order to work with individual team of pupils (see Fig. 1 below). Their Czech counterparts acted as facilitators or advisors to their pupils during these lessons.



Figure1. An example of a conversation lesson

Responses after the completion of the project were completely positive. Children thoroughly enjoyed these conversation classes. In addition, most of them had not had any chances to speak with a foreigner in English before the project started. Therefore, they felt quite enthusiastic about being understood by a foreign speaker and being able to understand him/her. As one parent said:

*It is very motivating for kids because they can apply the language they learn during the lesson with their Czech teacher in talking with a foreign person who speaks that language, too. Moreover, they are happy when the foreign teacher understands them and they understand her/him. They can see that without knowing a foreign language, particularly English, they would not be able to make themselves understood in the present world. It is a big asset to know and speak English nowadays.*



Obviously the project generated more benefits for students such as cooperation among the pupils themselves. They learned how to work in a team, how to delegate tasks, how to make a compromise and concessions or how to take on a responsibility for their tasks. They became more autonomous in their learning. Furthermore, besides enhancing and practising the language skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking) they acquired during the lessons with their Czech teacher, they learned the skills of rhetoric since they had to speak clearly and loudly. Moreover, they stopped being afraid of speaking with someone else in English. They also practised pronunciation and intonation of individual words or phrases. When they worked on a computer, they also expanded their computer skills. In addition, they discovered different culture and perhaps they started to realize what their own culture is like and what they value in their own culture and in their life.

### Useful sources/websites

A list of tested and evaluated websites with a short description for the learning of English:

- *Youtube.com* is a website which is widely used by English teachers because it affects most of student's senses and develops all four language skills at a time: listening, reading, writing and speaking.
- *TeachingEnglish.org.uk* is a website which was developed by the British Council and BBC. Besides teacher training, teacher development, exams in English, and various events, this site also serves as a valuable resource for L2 English teachers. It offers plans and activities, completed with worksheets to download, for primary, secondary and adult teachers.
- *HelpForEnglish.cz* is a website developed by a Czech teacher of English. It again focuses on all age levels and offers a great number of teaching resources, such as tests, grammar and vocabulary exercises, pronunciation, reading and listening activities, quizzes, and many more tips.
- *BusyTeacher.org* is another website which supplies ready-made worksheets on different everyday and seasonal topics for English teachers. In addition, it provides ESL (English as a second language) articles, classroom management worksheets, flashcards, classroom posters and other materials. Once again this website covers all age groups.
- *ListentoEnglish.com* is a podcast website for the intermediate and advanced learners of English, mostly aimed at adult learners. The podcasts on this site help to improve English vocabulary, pronunciation and listening skills. They are quite short (5 or 6 minutes) and delivered in clearly spoken English. Many are linked to grammar and vocabulary notes, exercises or quizzes.

- Some publishing houses offer an on-line support for coursebooks. See, for example, FRAUS publishing house and the online support for the coursebook *Start with Click New* (Karásková & Šádek, 2007): <http://ucebnice.fraus.cz/rozsireni/on-line-podpora-start-with-click-new-2/>.
- Teachers also try to make some additional materials for their students and make their own web pages in order to provide their students with more practice. See, for example, the following web page for inspiration: <http://www.katerinapeskova.cz/>.

### Conclusion

Information and communication technologies are undoubtedly part and parcel of everyday life. Children find them as natural as it is breathing for them. Therefore, language teachers should take advantage of this fact and implement CALL into their teaching. It was proved that modern ICT, e.g. multimedia, were stimulating and appealing for students. Moreover, they affect more senses at a time and thus, they could expand students' memory to remember things in an easier way. Technologies can also help students develop more language skills and raise their intercultural awareness.

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