

Introduction

Computers—the most powerful dimension of the second or foreign language learning experience since the advent of the teacher—serve as tireless *portals* to limitless target language models and, more important for the classroom, as tools for activities that draw students together to cooperate on activities that interest them and stimulate their creative language production and comprehension, all while challenging them to overcome obstacles in a complex environment in the target language. In the computer-assisted language learning (CALL) classroom, students don't study language as much as use it to cooperate and solve problems not unique to the language classroom. If we recognize the value in the *process* more than *product*, then we can appreciate that when a CALL class activity gets messy, and it does, it's realistic: It reflects real language use and life in general with unforeseen problems and the need for creative solutions using a tool central to modern life.

What are the greatest obstacles to realizing this learning potential of the CALL classroom?

1. Users not appreciating these challenges in the *process* as being valuable to language *use* and therefore learning. These challenges may take many forms for students:
 - following verbal and written instruction
 - needing to gain comprehension in one step in order to get to the next
 - consulting each other for clarification
 - helping struggling neighbors with secondary instruction
 - translating concepts (activity ideas) into action (specific procedures)
 - working through challenges and problems with language and procedures
 - being immersed in the target language on screen, content, and interface
2. Teachers not being adequately oriented to this relatively new, challenging environment in terms of their own comfort with personal computing, as well as effective CALL pedagogy, practical activities, and relevant resources.

Why This Book?

I wrote this book because I couldn't find one to recommend to the hundreds of teachers, graduate students, and administrators I've met over the years trying to solve the mystery of how to integrate computers into their language teaching curriculum in second and foreign language environments. What would I have liked to recommend? *A concise, accessible, practical guide to using computers in language instruction*; one that gives context and meaning to the computer environment; one that includes the Internet but is not limited to it; and one that addresses the immediate needs of teachers faced with having to integrate computers into their curriculum, whether by choice or not. Teachers often don't have the time to scramble for pieces of this puzzle through journal and web articles, *listserv*¹ archives, or inquiries (where general ones never get answered anyway) or through computer activity texts that tend to focus on one resource (usually the Internet) without capitalizing on the richness of the computing environment as a whole. Other texts, conversely, speak in a scholarly theoretical or retrospective vein about CALL and its effectiveness.

While teachers scramble for activities they can take into the classroom tomorrow, they also need a practical perspective that connects these ideas with an understanding of the wider context for language learning offered in this relatively new environment. As teachers gain some appreciation for the richness of the immersion environment offered by CALL, in combination with the practical challenges to students communicating in the target language, their fears of not completing an identifiable or predetermined lesson objective within a controlled environment (the analog lab or conventional classroom) subside. That is, the usefulness of the lab in building communicative competency can be seen in the *process*, the struggle with activities, at least as much as in the *product*, or the completion of an activity.

Who Needs This Book?

Educators using computers to teach any language, foreign or second, or to develop curriculum with computing resources, will find practical advice on the subject. Although most of my experience is with large college-based language centers and departments, most of the discussion and activities maintain relevance across a broad spectrum of users and environments. These include small, independent language schools, even ones with no dedicated lab staff, that have a small number of machines (perhaps not constituting a "lab" at all), no Internet access or local network, and a tiny budget for software.

Prospective language teachers—primarily those in graduate modern foreign language departments and schools of education (such as educational technology and TESOL)—will find application to their study of language pedagogy in a working context in specific discussions on classroom techniques, activities, and pitfalls.

¹In this book, I am using *listserv* in a generic sense to mean electronic discussion list.

A note about the issue of computer *platform*—the operating system (OS) that runs the computer, such as Windows®, Macintosh® (Mac®), and Linux®. In Chapter 10 I try to debunk the myths often driving platform choice and clouding compatibility issues generally. Otherwise, I consider platform issues *irrelevant* for the larger purpose of this book. When I talk about what you can do on “a computer,” I’m talking about capabilities commonly available across applications on Macs and PCs (and, to a lesser extent, on Linux, too). The enduring value I hope to impart in this book, which is not a technical manual, cannot be diminished or made obsolete by updated versions of the OS, which, at the application level, is largely inconsequential.

Technical terms that are glossed in Appendix A are in boldface italics in the text.

A Note on Sources

Online resources provided the bulwark of research sources for this book. Content from magazines, journals, newspapers, and user groups available on the web offered fast and free access to a great deal of current information. Through Boston University’s subscription to LexisNexis®, I was also able to access text from virtually any newspaper, magazine, journal, or industry report of interest. In addition, the CALL community generously shares its practical technical, pedagogical, and curricular knowledge through listservs² and individual and lab websites. If any field demonstrates the usefulness of the academic model of free exchange of ideas and information enabled globally, instantaneously, and free thanks to the Internet, it is CALL. (See Appendix H, Selected CALL Resources for selected online resources.)

Notes on Typographic Conventions and Terms

Menu Commands

Insert > Picture > From File...

The main *menu* of an application stretches across the top of the screen from left to right, usually including the categories **File**, **Edit**, **View**, etc. In this book, menus and commands found in the menu drop-down boxes are in **bold**. The right arrow (>), or greater than symbol, indicates a submenu. For example, execute the command above by clicking on the **Insert** menu, then choosing **Picture** within that drop-down menu,

²A listserv operates like an e-mail group. A message sent to the listserv goes out to all subscribers. Some listservs are moderated, meaning that an editor reviews each message for appropriateness before posting it to the community. (See Chapter 5, Activity 5, Mailing Lists.) Two excellent CALL listservs are Language Learning Technology International (LLTI), operated by Otmar Foelsche at <http://iall.net>, and CALLIS, the CALL interest section of TESOL, www.tesol.org.

and finally choosing **From File...** from the resulting submenu. The expansion of submenu items to the right or left is known as *cascading menus*. The minor ellipses (...) indicate a *dialog box* (where you make further choices) to follow that command. A colon (:) between items indicates not another menu to follow but a specific tab or field choice within the resulting dialog box.

Keyboards

Enter/return refers to the key with one of those labels on a computer's alpha keyboard, formerly known as the "carriage return" key on typewriters. Most Mac keyboards label this key **return**, while most PC keyboards label it **enter**.

Shortcut Key Commands

Control-C (or Ctrl-C)

Control (Ctrl) and **C** are each keys on the keyboard. *Keyboard shortcuts* call for pressing the given combination (hold down **Control** then hit **C**, but don't be concerned with depressing both precisely simultaneously). By convention, a hyphen usually separates separate keys in representing the shortcut but is itself not typed.

Software Versions

An italicized lowercase *x*, *x*, represents something of a wildcard character, or shorthand, in denoting software versions. For example, Mac OS® 10.*x* represents all versions of the Mac OS in that particular version generation, including 10.0 to 10.3 (and beyond). Likewise, Windows Server™ 200*x* represents versions of that software from 2000 to 2004 (and beyond).

Web Address Format

The global address of a page or other file on the web is often referred to as its *URL* (uniform resource locator). When typing a URL in a *web browser* location line or in an open page dialog box (**File > Open > Location**) to load a particular page, you do not need to type the entire address. For example, the complete URL of the Center for English Language and Orientation Programs at Boston University

http:// www. bu. edu /celop/ index.html
protocol | web server | domain name | domain | website folder | page file name

can be expressed as

bu.edu/celop

The **protocol**, *http*, is assumed by the web browser; the *www* name of the web server is usually assumed as default, so *bu.edu* resolves to (or forwards to) *www.bu.edu*; and when you specify a location that ends in the folder name instead of a specific file within the folder, most web servers automatically display the file named *index.html* or *default.html* to prevent a visitor from viewing a directory list. (We know that *celop* is a folder and not a file because it does not include a **file extension** [what follows the period] identifying its type, such as .html or .htm, .pdf, .ra, etc.). With so many URLs to write and follow in life, we need to take all the shortcuts we can. Note further that most web browsers assume the domain *.com* where none is indicated, because the vast majority of pages on the web are found in that domain, thus simply typing *apple* should resolve to *apple.com* and thus the full URL, *http://www.apple.com/*. In this text, this site might be referred to as *apple.com*.

Web Addresses for Reference

URLs for in-text references are given at the end of each section or chapter.

Character Case

Most keyboard shortcuts are case sensitive, meaning that **Ctrl-c** will not work as **Ctrl-C** (**Control-Shift-C**). In a web address (URL), only a part of it is case sensitive. Everything after the domain, representing folders and files on the web server, is case sensitive. The part of the following URL after *.edu* is case sensitive. Be sure the CAPS LOCK key is not on when typing a URL.

WWW.BU.EDU/celop/resources/faqs/index.html

not case sensitive | case sensitive

Internet Resources

Unlike print media, which remain on the shelf or archived, Internet resources come and go, some staying longer than others. Where I've supplied websites (URLs) or e-mail addresses, I've attempted to stick to ones that have a track record of at least a few years and have affiliations with institutions or established professionals in their field.