



Effectiveness of Call in Teaching (L2) the Modern Greek Language in Higher Education: a Study in North America

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Abstract

The need for teaching foreign languages has led to the emergence of a new interdisciplinary field named CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning) in the 1980s. The rapid evolution of this field is interlinked with important advances in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) because these technologies can provide the tools and assistance of teaching a second or foreign language. Such CALL courseware is useful especially when this language is Modern Greek which belongs to the category of languages that are less spoken. In the 1990s teaching Modern Greek Language as a second or foreign language (L2) has followed the wide-spread use of Information and Communication Technologies. The last decade some Universities in North America started to produce educational software for assisting in teaching Modern Greek as a second or foreign language in the last decade. The main idea of integrating CALL material in the classrooms of the higher education institutes was developed because of the needs of the learners in today high developed technological world. The main aim of this development is teaching Modern Greek university students and adults as a foreign language in an appropriate and effective way.

Before examining the effectiveness of CALL material in learning Modern Greek, it is necessary to define the meaning of effectiveness. Effectiveness is the power to produce effects or intended results. The change of the learning process through CALL courseware depends on the language instructors and their computer skills as well as their training in CALL material. The instructors play an important role to the learning process and their awareness is necessary because they have applied their knowledge of using computers and CALL material to their students.

This study also examines the (L2) learners' Modern Greek profile as well as the advantages of the use of computer software in the university classrooms.

CALL courseware started to play a significant role in the Modern Greek teaching university environment of the last decade, and especially in the effectiveness of learning processes and the increasing interest of the learners. The effectiveness of this software in the learning environment is difficult to measure because there are concerns about the technical support and the training of the language instructors in use of computers and implementation of CALL courseware.

In this study, the conclusions for the effectiveness of CALL Greek material in higher education are presented and provide an introduction to the significance of the use of this courseware and the contribution to the Modern Greek language learners.

1.Introduction

In the early 1990s some Greek universities as well as universities in North America in 2000s started to produce educational software for assisting in teaching Modern Greek as a second or foreign language in the last decade. Teaching Greek as a second language means teaching those people who are of

Greek origin and live in other countries. Teaching Modern Greek as a foreign language means teaching those who are foreigners, live in Greece or outside the country.

Before examining the effectiveness of CALL courseware in learning Modern Greek, it is necessary to define the meaning of the effectiveness. According to the definition provided by the Webster Dictionary, effectiveness is the power to produce effects or intended results. It is a strong relationship between the use of a particular technology in a learning situation and a discernible change in the learning process, the learning environment or the learning achievement [1]. The change of the learning process primarily depends on the language instructors and their computer skills as well as their training in CALL courseware.

The effectiveness of this material depends partially on the awareness of the instructors. Language instructors need training in developing a positive attitude towards technology and the use of CALL courseware in an effective way assisting the teaching environment and the learning process of their students.

The use of CALL courseware has raised objections and acceptance, both by a large number of language researchers and instructors. According to the supporters of an educational point of view, it is clear that computers promote a student-centered way of learning [2]. The advantages of computers for learners exceed the disadvantages, and can be summarized as follows:

- "The computer is capable of greater communicative interchange than is possible with any other educational medium".
- "The new technology (micro-computing in foreign language learning) offers unprecedented exposure to authentic samples of other cultures, integrating sound, symbol and image in ways that appeal to a broad range of learners".
- The technology also offers access to natural language resources.
- Computers create a learning environment where social conflicts are temporarily suspended.
- Technology also provides learners with the option of working in their own pace.
- An additional advantage is the evaluation procedure such as the feedback.

The use of computers offers advantages to language instructors because they allow them to process and present authentic materials with high flexibility. Instructors can store large databases containing natural language documents on computers. "Diversity is an important teaching prerequisite which affects the learner's motivation" [3]. This motivation is increased through CALL because "learning with computers is highly rated by students".

Particularly, CALL material is a program designed to educate effectively. This kind of software should function as a mind tool for assisting learners to think, interpret, organize and construct their knowledge. This tool should provide the students with the guidance they need [4]. The use of CALL courseware in teaching Modern Greek as a foreign language is more effective when an appropriate educational software is developed [5].

2. L2 Learner's Modern Greek Profile in North America

There is a large number of people in all over the world today who are interested in learning Modern Greek language. In the following, the (L2) learner's Modern Greek profile is described in detail.

The learner group consists of young students who are between 18 and 22 years old or adults, male and female, in a university environment. Some of them are of Greek origin and live outside of Greece. The main aim is to learn the language of their ancestors and preserve their culture and traditions. Others do not have any knowledge of Modern Greek language or any kind of experience with Greek culture. Their motivation is the willingness of learning a foreign language different from any other

language as well as a language recognized through its history. They have selected to study Modern Greek as a foreign language for a variety of academic, professional or personal reasons. The university students are interested in learning a language related to their disciplines such as Classical Studies, Humanities or Computer Science because this language is the base language of computers. The students are coming from a variety of scientific and cultural backgrounds and are interested in learning Modern Greek in order to extend their horizons and cultivate themselves. One more reason is their interest in learning more about a language with a long history.

The adult learners have different motivations than the university students. Some of their motivations are as follows: their interest in traveling to Greece, their interest in learning more about the Greek culture and civilization through the Greek books and sources, their interest in using a language which is the base of the scientific terminology such as medicine, philosophy etc.

The learners at the universities in North America have used the same textbook and CALL courseware recommended by the university instructors.

They have started to learn the language through a diverse teaching environment which uses different techniques in approaching a foreign language. Some of these learners have a strong knowledge in using computers, exploring the software and improving their foreign language skills through a specific CALL material. This material has provided the students with the opportunity to practice through different types of exercises and cultural activities. The exercises are based on comprehension, exploitation, manipulation and creation activities. They offer a rewarding system, and the students can learn to produce spoken or written speech in a positive and rewarding environment.

The (L2) Modern Greek learner's profile presents a person with the willingness or ability to learn through technology.

This learner does not always produce effective and appropriate oral or written speech because the CALL material do not always cover all the grammar, syntax and vocabulary information and activities.

3. Effectiveness of CALL Courseware in Learning Modern Greek in Higher Education

Since the 1990s, progress has occurred in the (L2) Greek language learning environment through technology.

The new approach of knowledge is based on the CALL lessons because of the high impact of technologies on the students' life today. There is a number of CALL software in learning (L2) Modern Greek language designed and applied by universities in North America. In the 2000s some universities have developed projects for designing and implementing new Greek material for CALL providing the university students and the adults. Some universities in the United States such as Columbia, Yale, Princeton as well as Canadian universities developed CALL courseware to assist their students and in the near future, long distance students to learn the Modern Greek language.

In particular, Yale University developed an electronic Pictionary. This project is for elementary Modern Greek classes. The database for intermediate students is also under development. The first one is based on the flash-cards methods of vocabulary acquisition and has Greek-English and English-Greek pathways. The database includes pictures for most nouns, sentences for all verbs as well as audio reinforcement of both vocabulary and sentences. Students can choose from the entire database according to the chapter units, part of speech, thematic units and alphabetical index. This project is designed by the main professor in Modern Greek and his assistants.

Some universities in North America have developed CALL courseware for assisting instructors and learners. For instance, Simon Fraser University of Canada developed the distance education program



for Modern Greek (Greek 110 online). This program is offered to their students. The Thompson River Open Learning University has also developed the online Greek course for students of other universities.

The effectiveness of the CALL material is described better through an holistic approach. This holistic approach of CALL evaluation and its level of effectiveness are based on facts described as follows:

- Computer is a medium used to enrich the (L2) Modern Greek learning environment.
- The previous experience of (L2) Modern Greek learners in Computer-assisted learning environment plays a significant role.
- The variety of teaching methodology applied by the language instructors [6].
- The main goals of the language instructors in teaching process play an important role in the effectiveness of CALL software. The first goal is to guide learners in order to learn how to use the computer support -including complex help/information files such as electronic dictionaries, linguistic explanations and exercises. The second goal is to offer an insight view of the real language.
- The (L2) Modern Greek learner's profile is defined by his/her ability to determine the objectives of the learning process.
- The level of achievement is based on the feedback and the evaluation of CALL software.

The computer-assisted language learning environment has advantages compared to a textbook-based learning environment [7]. The main advantages are the following:

- CALL material can be integrated with class work.
- Computers provide language instructors with the option of revising the material rapidly and extensively.
- Through CALL material the students can be provided with explanations and help-screens.
- Technologies can accept more than one correct answer for a question.
- Computers can enrich the classroom activities.
- Through computers the learners can use the Web as a resource of online interactive quizzes, encyclopedias and grammar exercises.
- Finally, CALL material offer learners the engagement in high level of cognitive processes.

According to the above facts that play a significant role in the evaluation and effectiveness of CALL material, there are also major linguistic areas that contribute to the evaluation and the improvement of the computer-assisted Modern Greek learning environment. These areas are the linguistic infrastructure, the syllabus structure, the grammar and the vocabulary provided by CALL material [8].

Students can use different types of exercises to develop specific language skills such as reading, listening, writing, vocabulary and syntax. The results of the exercises provided by the syllabus and the feedback can lead to the evaluation of CALL courseware. This CALL material is also measured through the CALL software evaluation form. The effectiveness cannot be easily quantified. Two main reasons are the ranging of the technical infrastructure and the awareness of the instructors.

4. Conclusions

In the decade of the 2000s, some project proposals of CALL courseware were designed by American and Canadian universities to assist the (L2) Modern Greek language learning environment especially in the higher education institutes. This software includes many practical activities such as phonetic, lexical, grammatical, semantic, and word formation exercises. The design of this courseware aims at the improvement of very specific skills of the (L2) learners such as reading, writing and communication skills and the enrichment of their vocabulary. CALL material consists of electronic dictionaries,

electronic pictorial, electronic vocabulary lists of the most frequently used words in Modern Greek and multimedia courseware for learning Modern Greek as a foreign language.

The use of CALL software in (L2) Modern Greek university learner's environment is still at the beginning of its implementation. The effectiveness of this use is difficult to be determined.

The effectiveness of the CALL material in learning Modern Greek as a foreign language at the universities should be based on adequate educational software and the mother tongue of the learners. The training of the instructors on the use of CALL courseware is an essential educational tool [9]. There are still concerns about the technical difficulties that interfere with the learning process [10].

One more concern is the computer literacy and use by older learners who are not comfortable with the new technology.

Finally, the effectiveness can be estimated through three conditions that need to be established: a) a stable technical support for computer hardware and software and b) the education and training of the instructors in computer use and the CALL courseware implementation [11]. The third condition is the willingness of instructors to create suitable CALL material [12]. Many more studies and research need to take place in universities and other higher education institutes not only in North America but in the rest of the world where a great number of learners are interested in Modern Greek language.

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