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CALICO at Center Stage: Our Emerging Rights and Responsibilities

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Abstract

The year of languages (see www.actfl.org) in the United States is a good time to reflect on where CALICO is as a professional group of technology users, developers, and researchers. My thoughts on this issue come from my background and concerns stemming from my work in ESL in higher education. However, most CALICO members are likely to share at least some of my concerns. After all, higher education has a considerable impact on people throughout the profession— at least it should. In higher education, our mission, simply put, is to create and disseminate knowledge. Issues in ESL are sometimes seen as distant from those in foreign language, and there are some important differences, but when it comes to technology and language learning, a lot of common ground exists as well. Intellectually, we are all concerned with issues in applied linguistics—particularly issues of language learning, teaching, and assessment. Sociologically, we are positioned within departments of languages and linguistics, where we represent a minority. In fact, historically speaking, many CALICO members can recall their position as an eccentric minority in their language department. CALICO members were the strange professors who were writing programs for learners to study past tense verbs rather than papers on the underlying structure of gerunds or the influence of a Canadian author on the literature of the 1940s. Technology held a very marginal place in language departments.

Disciplines

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*CALICO at Center Stage: Our Emerging Rights and Responsibilities**

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INTRODUCTION

The year of languages (see www.actfl.org) in the United States is a good time to reflect on where CALICO is as a professional group of technology users, developers, and researchers. My thoughts on this issue come from my background and concerns stemming from my work in ESL in higher education. However, most CALICO members are likely to share at least some of my concerns. After all, higher education has a considerable impact on people throughout the profession—at least it should. In higher education, our mission, simply put, is to create and disseminate knowledge. Issues in ESL are sometimes seen as distant from those in foreign language, and there are some important differences, but when it comes to technology and language learning, a lot of common ground exists as well. Intellectually, we are all concerned with issues in applied linguistics—particularly issues of language learning, teaching, and assessment. Sociologically, we are positioned within departments of languages and linguistics, where we represent a minority. In fact, historically speaking, many CALICO members can recall their position as an eccentric minority in their language department. CALICO members were the strange professors who were writing programs for learners to study past tense verbs rather than papers on the underlying structure of gerunds or the influence of a Canadian author on the literature of the 1940s. Technology held a very marginal place in language departments.

That was years ago, and the technological landscape has changed! The opening plenary at the 2005 CALICO conference at Michigan State University vividly demonstrated the radical changes in higher education that have affected us in second language teaching. The vice provost of Michigan State University, David Gift, explored some of the campus-wide technology issues he deals with, and, in doing so, he underscored the critical role played by scholars like those in CALICO whose aim is to better understand and improve pedagogy drawing on technology. After all, it is the “age of technology.” This year, which was designated as a year for making a deliberate effort to raise public awareness to the importance of languages other than English in the United States, the age of technology intersects

*Keynote address delivered at CALICO’s annual conference in May 2005 at Michigan State University

with the year of languages. The title of this paper suggests the implication for CALICO at this important juncture: CALICO is at center stage. Yesterday's eccentrics now hold a central place in second language teaching in higher education. The time is right to consider our emerging rights and responsibilities in this era.

OUR RIGHTS

Because the technological landscape within higher education has changed dramatically over the past 20 years, we should be able to argue that language educators concerned with CALL hold claim to some rights within the language departments at universities. From my perspective in ESL and applied linguistics in an English Department, three rights seem obvious.

Value Placed on our Scholarship

The most fundamental of CALICO members' rights in higher education is that colleagues in language departments and outside reviewers must place value on technology-based scholarship. If faculty cannot get evaluated positively for the work they do in CALL, no hope exists for CALL as a scholarly area of inquiry, and it will forever be relegated to the margins of the profession. What sensible academic would take up an area of inquiry for which there was no foreseeable career path? Devaluation of technology-based scholarship has threatened to impede real intellectual progress in this area, containing the level of knowledge and insight about CALL that can be created and disseminated.

At least five scholarly journals publish scholarship on technology and language learning. In addition to the *CALICO Journal*, there is *ReCALL*, the journal of our European sister organization; *CALL Journal*, published by Routledge; *Language Learning & Technology*, published by the language resource centers at the University of Hawaii and Michigan State University; and its French language counterpart, *Apprentissage des Langues et Systèmes d'Information et de Communication (ALSIC)* published at Université Marc Bloch, Strasbourg, France. These journals are dedicated to work that explores and investigates technology-related issues associated with second language learning and teaching. In addition, technology research that connects and speaks to the larger profession, can be found in all journals of applied linguistics. For example, *The Modern Language Journal* has published papers on technology and language learning regularly over the past 20 plus years.

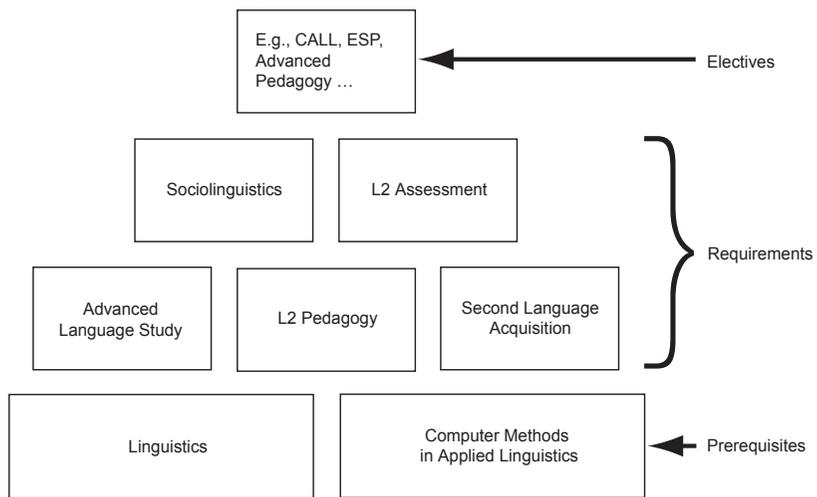
A Place in the Graduate Curriculum

In view of the place of technology in research and practice, learning how and why to work with computers and the Internet should hold a central place in the graduate curriculum in language education and applied linguistics. Typically, such MA programs in the United States include required courses such as linguistics, advanced study of the language, language pedagogy, second language acquisition, language assessment, and sociolinguistics. If a course on CALL is offered, it is typically an elective. Many programs have no courses in CALL but, instead,

send their students to the Department of Curriculum and Instruction for a general course in technology and learning. Despite the value of these technology-as-add-on courses, this approach to technology in graduate education in applied linguistics seems to be at odds with the reality of the central role that technology plays in our profession today.

In 1998 at Iowa State University, the MA program in TESL/Applied Linguistics instituted a curriculum that attempts to provide a “technology-as-central” approach. The curriculum design is illustrated in Figure 1 as a pyramid with the required courses in the middle two levels, which are supported by the introduction to linguistics and the computer methods course. The foundation of the pyramid is referred to as the prerequisites to denote that these provide the basic foundation that the requirements and electives build upon. Students with a substantial background in linguistics or technology would not need to take these courses. In fact, many entering students have fulfilled the linguistics prerequisite, but fewer have fulfilled the technology requirement.

Figure 1
MA TESL/Applied Linguistics Program at Iowa State University



Note: ESP = English for Specific Purposes; L2 = Second Language

The course “Computer Methods in Applied Linguistics” at this point in the curriculum succeeds in helping students to develop the skills and ideas that help them to see the technology connections with other courses even if they are not specializing in CALL. For those students who wish to specialize in CALL, of course we have a class that focuses on pedagogy and research in CALL. The students take that course in addition to another technology course outside our program, and they write a thesis on CALL. In this way, the curriculum not only gives all students the skills and perspectives they need to “think technology,” but it also creates the opportunity for an advanced-level CALL course that focuses primar-

ily on pedagogy and research issues rather than largely on how to use authoring tools.

Technical Support and Equipment

It should go without saying that faculty and students working and studying in higher education have the right to up-to-date computer equipment and software. In fact, this probably does go without saying in most universities in the United States—at least partially. The computer equipment and at least basic software seems to be part of the educational landscape. However, what remains is often an unmet need for specialized software and technical support and expertise. If technology is to be used extensively and creatively in teaching and research, CALICO members have the right to the necessary technical support.

These three rights come to my mind regularly as I work in an environment where technology is so fundamental to all we do in higher education. It supports instruction in ESL and other courses; it is both the object of investigation and the tool for conducting research. In my setting, the applied linguistics faculty have, for the most part achieved these three rights, but to do so required that we get organized, identify our needs, and move persistently toward our goals. By far, the most difficult to achieve was the reorganization of the curriculum to place the technology methods course at the foundation along with linguistics. To achieve these rights the applied linguistics faculty had to work together and endure the pressure from other faculty. Having done so, we have obtained rights that are accompanied by responsibilities such as those below.

OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

At the intersection of the year of languages and age of technology, we have some important responsibilities as technology-using language teachers and applied linguists. Three central responsibilities come to my mind although many more could undoubtedly be identified.

Doing Good Scholarship

Our right to have our scholarship valued fits hand in hand with our responsibility for doing good scholarship. If we want our colleagues to value our work, we need to produce valuable work. Our primary concern is the design and evaluation of technology-based tasks for language learning. A number of perspectives can fruitfully be drawn upon to accomplish such goals; however, it seems clear that our scholarship needs to consider and engage with principles of research in applied linguistics as outlined in texts on research methods in applied linguistics. Two new texts have just appeared this year. One of them, *Second Language Research: Methodology and Design* (Mackey & Gass, 2005) provides a comprehensive introduction to the issues associated with all phases of conducting L2 research from conceptualization to writing up the results. One chapter discusses classroom research thereby touching upon the issues that CALL researchers come across in

studying CALL in classroom contexts. A second book, *Analyzing Learner Language* (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2004), reviews the many different perspectives that have motivated analysis of learners' linguistic production and is therefore relevant to the study of language learners' use of computer-mediated communication (CMC).

The methods that are outlined in the authoritative texts in our field are exemplified in some of the research published in the professional journals. Table 1 summarizes some of the dominant approaches to applied linguistics research today with their purposes and examples from research on CALL.

Table 1
Research Methods in Applied Linguistics and Examples from CALL

Methods	Purpose	Example from CALL
Experimental and quasi-experimental	Comparison of two or more conditions for learning	Borrás & Lafayette (1994), García, & Arbeláiz (2003), Yoshii & Flaitz (2002)
Case study	In depth analysis of a learner, a class, or a language program	Jamieson, Chapelle, & Preiss (this issue), Thorne (2003)
Discourse or interaction analysis	Analysis of particular functional moves within the language of interest	Blake (2000), Chun (1994), Smith (2004)
Conversation analysis	Description of how language is deployed to perform social action	Negretti (1999), Warner (2004)
Ethnographic	Multiperspective, longitudinal documentation and interpretation of events in a context of interest	Belz (2001), Lam (2000)

Experimental research compares two or more conditions for learning. This method in CALL is often associated with the question that was so important in the past: How does learning in the classroom compare with learning through CALL? Today, the comparisons address questions more finely tuned to better understanding various design options for CALL such as whether or not subtitles are useful for comprehension and acquisition (Borrás & Lafayette, 1994) and whether or not multiple modes of vocabulary support help learners to remember new vocabulary presented in reading (Yoshii & Flaitz, 2002). Comparisons are also useful for understanding how specific learning processes such as negotiation for meaning occur in CMC relative to how it occurs in face-to-face classroom activities (García, & Arbeláiz, 2003).

Case study research provides an in depth look at a learner as he or she chooses and works with technology for language learning (e.g., Thorne, 2003). For CALL research, the relevant case is often the class in which teachers and learners work

with specific CALL activities, and questions concern the appropriateness of the activities for the group (e.g., Jamieson, Chapelle, & Preiss, this issue). Other qualitative methods include discourse analysis, which focuses on specific functional moves learners engage in such as those for negotiating meaning (Blake, 2000), expressing interactional competence (Chun, 1994), and providing input modification (Smith, 2004). Many of the studies examining functional moves in the discourse of CMC focus on specific moves theorized to be relevant to second language acquisition. Studies drawing on conversation analysis, in contrast, tend to be more descriptive of the ways in which learners accomplish social action such as closings (Negretti, 1999) or play (Warner, 2004) through online communication. Ethnography is another approach to qualitative analysis that extends beyond the learners, language, and classes to explore the broad range of ideological, institutional, and social factors relevant to technology in language learning (Belz, 2001; Lam, 2000).

These methodologies provide CALL specialists with some complementary ways of learning about CALL. Ideally, they should provide a means for CALL professionals to gain an evidence-based understanding of the factors relevant to selecting, developing, and evaluating CALL. Such approaches are well accepted and valued in applied linguistics. Insofar as we succeed in interpreting results of such research, we should be in the position to share our expertise.

Sharing our Expertise

When Vice Provost Gift welcomed us in the opening plenary, he expressed great enthusiasm in what we have to offer higher education from focused research and development in CALL. His optimism about the value of our scholarly pursuits sounded similar to what I have heard from other university administrators, publishers, and providers of English language materials and courses. This optimism on the one hand is very welcome: Sensible people with the resources to implement our ideas look to CALICO members for advice and guidance. What a change from the days when we were considered eccentrics at the margins of academia! On the other hand, such requests for advice should prompt us to consider what it is that we know about CALL that can be used and shared. Our work with technology over the past years has given each of us some valuable experience-based knowledge, but, collectively, what is the knowledge that we have obtained as a profession through years of research on CALL?

Intellectual and Academic Contributions

Based on research conducted in CALL, one might make a number of suggestions about findings as they pertain to our intellectual or academic contributions to the field of language teaching. Some of those that may be justified based on research are shown in Table 2, each with an example of a study whose findings support the suggestion and the research method used.

Studies such as the one by Plass, Chun, Mayer, and Leutner (1998) showed that learners tended to learn vocabulary better from online texts if they received

vocabulary help in multiple modes (e.g., aurally and visually) than if they only received one form of help. The researchers used an interaction analysis that recorded precisely the help requests that each learner made for each of the vocabulary words during reading. This study supports a second, more general statement that appears to be justified by research on CALL: Online help can help learners. A study using an experimental design also supports this suggestion. Borrás and Lafayette (1994) compared acquisition of French from an interactive multimedia presentation with and without L2 subtitle help. The group that had access to the subtitles were better able to use the language from the multimedia presentation to speak about the topic presented. A number of studies drawing on interaction analysis and experimental designs suggest that the time CALL developers spend providing help in CALL is time well spent.

Table 2
Pedagogical Suggestions Drawn from Research on CALL

Pedagogical suggestion	Example research finding	Research method
The more modes in which learners receive linguistic input, the better for learning.	Plass, Chun, Mayer, and Leutner (1998)	Interaction analysis
Online help can help learners.	Borrás and Lafayette (1994)	Experimental study
Teachers need to help learners be aware of the value of online help.	Kon (2002)	Case study
Explicit instruction and feedback is better for learning grammar than implicit instruction.	de Graaff (1997)	Experimental study
Teachers need to plan for good CMC experiences.	Blake (2000)	Discourse analysis
Teachers should consider how learners can increase their pragmatic competence in CMC.	Belz and Kinginger (2003)	Discourse analysis

A finding that appears frequently but is discussed seldom is that learners tend not to use help very much on their own. This finding is seldom presented in a prominent place in published studies, but, if the interaction data are presented, it is frequently apparent. The fact is that students tend to want to finish tasks, not explore the help that is available. We have seen this in the many studies that have examined help use in thesis projects despite the fact that the instructional materials are always designed carefully to coordinate with the class (e.g., Kon, 2002). The suggestion is that teachers need to help learners be aware of the value of online help and encourage them to use it (Hubbard, 2004).

Findings from experimental research on grammar instruction in CALL indicate that new grammatical knowledge is best developed through explicit instruction rather than through exposure to examples of target-like structures (de Graaff,

1997). This does not imply that grammatical knowledge should always be taught explicitly, but this study and others seem to suggest that CALL can play a demonstrably positive role in the development of grammatical knowledge through explicit instruction.

Discourse analytic studies such as the one Blake (2000) conducted on the CMC of Spanish learners suggest that if instructors plan CMC tasks with care, valuable interaction can result. Other studies examining discourse in unplanned CMC provide an interesting contrast as they demonstrate that CMC is an equally capable tool for interaction that is not particularly valuable for language development. Ethnographic studies such as the one conducted by Belz and Kinginger (2003) have demonstrated how the opportunities for development of pragmatic competence expand through cross-cultural CMC in ways that affect pragmatic aspects of language development. This research, along with work in pragmatics learning in classroom instruction (Kasper, 2001), demonstrates the need to consider the possibilities and needs for the development of pragmatic competence through CMC.

Political Contributions

The year of languages initiative is a politically motivated effort to focus national attention on the importance of foreign language learning and teaching. The politics of this initiative is associated with the money that should ultimately follow public recognition of needs: What is important should earn funding. How does technology fit? Where are CALICO members in the discussion of priorities and needs for foreign language teaching in the United States? It does not look as if CALICO members were heard at the recent meeting in Chapel Hill, North Carolina on January 10 and 11, 2005, called the “National Language Policy Summit: An American Plan for Action” to set priorities for language policy for the next decade in the United States (see <http://www.actfl.org/i4a/pages/Index.cfm?pageid=3725>). Leaders representing a number of sectors interested in foreign language teaching and learning set the following priorities:

1. raising the American public’s awareness of the need and value of learning languages and understanding cultures,
2. establishing at the federal level a National Language Advisor,
3. surveying businesses to identify their language and cultural needs,
4. partnering with CEOs of corporations to advocate for the importance of language and culture,
5. creating a fully articulated Chinese language program for students in grades kindergarten through college and subsequently expanding this model to other languages,
6. developing effective assessment strategies for measuring students’ language learning,
7. implementing a civilian language corps, and
8. advocating for expanded language legislation.

These are big priorities negotiated by a group with a variety of interests and

knowledge, and they are clearly worthwhile goals. I think that most CALICO members would agree, however, that the reality of technology's role along with our current state of understanding of its use in second language learning would suggest that technology should appear somewhere in these priorities. We are the ones responsible for sharing our understanding of the pressing needs for improving foreign language learning through technology.

Connecting with Applied Linguistics

One way of achieving a more substantial impact in higher education is to connect with others in higher education who are concerned with issues in language education. The organization that some CALICO members work with to accomplish this is the American Association for Applied Linguistics (see www.aal.org). The strands of topics for which proposals are invited for the 2006 conference are the following:

- Assessment and evaluation
- Bilingual, immersion, heritage, and language minority education
- Analysis of discourse and interaction
- Language acquisition and attrition
- Language cognition and brain research
- Language, culture and socialization
- Language and ideology
- Language and learner characteristics
- Language, planning and policy
- Second and foreign language pedagogy
- Applied linguistics research methodology
- Reading, writing, and literacy
- Sociolinguistics
- Language and technology
- Text analysis
- Translation and interpretation

These topic strands give an idea of the issues of concern to this organization. Notice that "language and technology" is one topic area, but it is interesting to look at this area relative to some of the others. For how many of the other areas would technology *not* be relevant to research? Text analysis? Reading, writing, and literacy? Second and foreign language pedagogy? Technology is prevalent throughout these areas, and so CALICO members have natural connections with this well established research organization.

In view of ways in which technology plays an integral role in all that is done in applied linguistics, it seems that contribution to this organization provides a means for CALICO members in higher education to share with the community of language education researchers in ways that are mutually beneficial. At Iowa State University, we have attempted to develop this natural synergy between research in applied linguistics and technology through our MA program in TESL/AL and our doctoral program in Applied Linguistics & Technology, which invites students to

focus on the topics motivated through the technology-applied linguistics connection. As CALICO members know, issues are sufficiently complex, interesting, and important to warrant doctoral study, and graduates from this and other such programs are badly needed to engage with the realities of technology and language learning today.

CONCLUSION

As a typical academic, I like to focus on interesting intellectual problems, attempt to produce elegant and creative solutions, and talk about them with colleagues who have interests similar to mine. However, it seems that the year of languages is calling academics in foreign language and applied linguistics to consider more general problems and engage with a larger society that does not yet recognize its interest in language education. But how do we do this? What should we say and do? It may be a good time to take stock of who we are and where we are today. We are no longer the eccentrics in the margin. In some important ways, CALICO is at center stage—a position that should afford us rights and hand us responsibilities. It may therefore be useful to assess this new role in the coming year of languages in the age of technology, as I have begun to do.

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