



Nottingham 2011



*The Call Triangle: student, teacher and institution*

## On Experience of Integrating CALL in Everyday Practice of Language Teaching

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### Abstract

This paper discusses the results of experiment on teaching CALL elements to second year Linguistics students as a part of syllabus of practical studies in IT course. The syllabus of the CALL part of IT course is described which is followed by the discussion about experience in implementing it, achieved results and arisen difficulties.

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*Key words:* IT course syllabus for linguists; CALL elements; specialized software; technology integration

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### 1. Introduction

Despite the wide use of the Internet and Information technology in everyday life it is premature to speak about efficient integration of the technology into language teaching and learning. A number of factors considered by St. Bax, (Bax, 2003:23, 24) aggravate the situation. Ch. Luke & J. Britten refer to a number of reports proving that many in-service teachers are unable or underprepared to successfully integrate computer technology into existing curricula and instructional methods (Luke&Britten, 2007:254), according to some estimates of CALL researchers from Russia only 10 per cent language teachers use CALL in their every day teaching practice (Аршинова, 2007), and in Sweden "ICT usage is still far less widespread than expected", reported M. Estling and I. Maricic in their paper presentation at EuroCALL-2011. It would be naïve to hope that students by themselves will master specialized software and Internet resources useful for language teachers and use them successfully in their future professional activity. Training is also needed because of the specialized nature of CALL tasks as P. Winke and S. Goertler report (Winke & Goertler, 2008:495). That is why we think that our experience in integrating CALL elements into the syllabus of practical studies in the IT course for second year Linguistics students is worth paying attention to. The methods used in this study are the following: classroom observations, analysis of materials and self-reports produced by the participants, informal surveys.

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## 2. CALL syllabus of practical studies in the IT course

Two reasons were behind the idea of introducing CALL elements in IT course for Linguistics students. The first one has already been mentioned: the necessity to familiarize future language teachers with specialized software and Internet resources. The other one was the results of monitoring IT practical lessons. It was revealed that neither IT teacher nor Linguistics students had been completely satisfied with standard practical training sessions according to the IT syllabus because it to some extent duplicated what they had studied at secondary school. As IT instructors are mostly not aware about specialized CALL software, it was decided that teachers from Department of Foreign Languages would provide this part of the course.

CALL part within IT practical lessons syllabus included 8 lessons, 90 min each for each academic group in a computer lab. The time was shared between mastering specialized software (5.5 lessons) and making students familiar with Internet resources useful for language teachers (2.5 lessons). The CALL syllabus included the following themes: Creating electronic resources using *Hot Potatoes* software; Online testing; Podcasts in language teaching and learning; Concordances and corpora; capabilities of *LDCE DVD* (5-th edition). The feedback included presenting results of team homework on creating interactive tests and developing a lesson plan using a podcast from VOA as well as doing individual tasks such as completing online diagnostic level test (Dudeny, 2008: 118) and reporting a month-long work on clarifying the meaning of unknown words from different courses using online concordances.

The course was taught to six academic groups of second year Linguistics students, a total of 70 undergraduates, in St Petersburg Polytechnic University in the autumn term of 2010/2011 academic year.

## 3. Software Characteristics

Hot Potatoes is a program that can be freely downloaded for educational purposes (<http://hotpot.uvic.ca/>). It allows users to create web-based exercises of the following types: multiple choice, short answer, jumbled sentence and word, crossword, matching/ordering, gap-fill, and to include media files and pictures. Before one can use it he has to master five subprograms or tools (*JCloze*, *JCross*, *JMix*, *JMatch*, *JQuiz*) and *The Masher* that allows users to unite files corresponding to specific tasks into a single test. *Hot Potatoes* is quite a user friendly program but to use it efficiently for language teaching/learning purpose a language teacher has to be inventive as some tasks can be made interactive with help of different tools of the program. When this is the case the task interface and feedback efficiency will be different.

karTatekA is a concordancer type program. The program is compatible only with text (.txt) files. Its minimal context is a complete sentence. To achieve this, a preliminary processing (.doc) files has to be done carefully. karTatekA provides word lists, sorted by frequency, alphabetically, by word length and forms an inverted list as well. It allows users to lemmatize words (to unite in a single word card all related words or words belonging to the same grammar class, e.g. modals, if it is important for a methodological purpose), to separate lexical or grammar homonyms, to make concordances of parallel text, to store the most interesting or informative contexts of a word in a special bank, and to search for words containing a particular morpheme or element. Word lists obtained during the last operation can be exported, stored as (.txt) files, and processed further. Concordance lines of a particular word, which are complete sentences, can be seen in the word card. The program also allows users to see an extended context for a particular word, which comprises five sentences: a sentence with the node word and four sentences following it in the text.

LDCE DVD is a set of multimedia software that provides a variety of searching ways, thesaurus functionality, word collocation information, information on frequency and etymology of words, games and exercises, audio recording of all words and many sentences in both British and American English, the ability to bookmark and personalize, and a number of other features. It is worth mentioning that after mastering Hot Potatoes tools for creating interactive tasks and abilities of karTatekA program Linguistics students could guess which programming tools were used by developers to create interactive Exercises and Vocabulary Trainer tasks on LDCE DVD or the principle of uniting words in Word sets feature that allows users to see a list of all clothes items from the dictionary stored in a folder Clothes as a result of searching for a particular clothes item, e.g. jeans.

## 4. Some Results of Teaching CALL Elements to Second Year Linguistics Students

As survey revealed the students had not been familiar with any item of the course before. On the whole they mastered the programs successfully though it was not an easy task for the instructor. While dealing

with an unfamiliar program they often made mistakes and usually could not understand causes of errors on their own and the instructor had to gain insights into the situation and correct it on students' PCs. This observation as well as reports of few students who had to master the program on their own make us conclude that the problem of transfer of computer skills from personal use to academic/professional use, in particular to the CALL domain, does exist though CALL researchers' conclusions on the issue differ (cf. Winke & Goertler, 2008:495 and Ushida, 2005: 49).

Working in groups at home students produced interactive tests but didn't give any comments on wrong answers (which they were told to do). The reasonable explanation for this is that students concentrated on choice of appropriate Hot Potatoes tools for making tasks interactive and just did not have enough time to do the methodological task which probably did not seem easy for them.

Another course item which required presenting results of team work was making up a lesson plan using a podcast from VOA Learning English site. Making up tasks for gist and comprehensive listening of a programme was not easy for students who are experienced learners of English but beginners in teaching. But in the end all projects met the requirements with some teams going far beyond, which showed the students' interest in the task, taste for methodological work, good computer skills and awareness of various CALL methods, e.g. webquesting.

As for individual tasks for homework students were more enthusiastic about doing online diagnostic level test and reporting the results of the activity and participating in LDCE DVD contest (which was optional). The task of clarifying the meaning of unknown words using the online concordances required students to keep vocabulary notes, be curious, punctual and persistent, and demonstrate analytical skills. The reports have revealed that most students did the task rather formally pointing out at the same time that instructions probably were not elaborated enough.

## 5. Conclusions

Despite all problems we think that experiment on teaching CALL elements to second year Linguistics students in the IT course has been successful. It allowed students to acquire skills necessary for language teachers, to master CALL software, which was new for them, to learn the first things about subjects that are taught later (in the third or fourth year), e.g. *Theory and Methodology of Teaching Foreign Languages* and make first independent steps in this area. Such anticipatory introduction of elements of future subjects in order to prepare students for their acquisition is regarded by specialists as interdisciplinary approach in teaching, which becomes more and more popular in these days (Попова, 2008). Therefore the institution plays the key role in familiarizing students with technological advances aiming at making the process of language learning more efficient and preparing future language teachers to integrate the technology into language teaching and learning and "experience successful and meaningful technology integration in their own lives and in their own classes at the university" as Ch. Luke & J. Britten put it (Luke&Britten, 2007:264)

## 6. Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Prof. A. Asinovsky. and programmer E. Nachinkin, the developers of *karTateka* program, for donating it to the Faculty of Foreign Languages at SPbSPU.

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