Computers and Four Language Skills Development*

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Chung-hyun Lee. 2006. Computers and Four Language Skills Development. *Language and Linguistics* 38, pp. 59–87. There has recently been an emphasis on the communicative approach in language teaching and learning. However, the ultimate objective of language teaching is to help learners develop four language skills - listening, speaking, reading, and writing - all together at an appropriate level. A number of distinctive characteristics that the computer offers can be applied to improving the four language skills, particularly the communicative skills. However, although computers can contribute to developing the skills, teachers must keep in mind that it cannot replace the teacher. It is the teacher who has the responsibility for creating a meaningful learning environment and facilitating successful language learning, armed with well-organized preparation technically and pedagogically. Teachers have to apply an appropriate or integrative methodology, and provide meaningful activities in the right place in order to achieve their aims in the language classroom. Therefore, the purposes of this paper are: first, to provide language teachers with how computers can contribute to developing the four language skills; second, to present appropriate CALL programs that can be used in the language classroom; and finally, to suggest some teaching and learning activities that can be employed in each language skill.

Keywords: Computers, Language skills, Methodology, CALL Programs, CALL Activities

1. Introduction

It was claimed in the 80’s that CALL (Computer-Assisted Language

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Learning) is suitable for some reading skills and writing skills development, but may not be appropriate for speaking skills, particularly free-spoken activities. However, there has been enormous progress over the past two decades in CALL. In terms of current developments of hardware and software, and methodological considerations, computers or multimedia can actually expand the range of activities available to developing four language skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

The computer is a medium or an environment in which a variety of language teaching methods or approaches and language skills can be implemented. Computers can do far more in CALL than only carry out simple learning tasks, such as stimulus-response type activities in certain skills, e.g., they can interact with students in various ways and individualize the learning process (Lee 1998, Wyatt 1984). In short, CALL can be designed to integrate into grammar-translation, cognitive learning, communicative and humanistic approaches, and be used for the development of the four language skills in foreign language learning and teaching (FLT/L) (Cook 1988, Stevens 1992). CALL should be re-evaluated, since it can be used with any approach from structuralism to the constructivism, and any language skill and the integrated four language skills. Therefore, this paper will look at CALL which is available in the language classroom and language skills development, i.e., how it can contribute to developing the four language skills, and some CALL programs and activities that can be employed in each skill.

2. Computers and Listening

As stated in the introductory section, the computer can carry out a variety of activities in the area of listening. However, the computer alone (i.e., without other peripherals) cannot offer as many useful benefits to the area of listening as it can do in that of reading or