Chapter 8
TELL, CALL, and MALL:
Approaches to Bridge the Language Gap

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ABSTRACT

Language learning has become a key objective for providing new generations with competences that allow them to cope with the challenges of the 21st century. However, the socio-economic changes affecting the world have provoked the development of what has been called "language gap," which implies that not everybody has the means to access language learning. In this situation, new educational approaches characterized by the use of technology have emerged making language learning more accessible than ever before. Among the possibilities, TELL (technology-enhanced language learning) and more particularly CALL (computer-assisted language learning) and MALL (mobile-assisted language learning), offer a great potential for this purpose. Thus, this chapter aims to revise the concepts of TELL, CALL, and MALL and explore their possibilities for language learning and, ultimately, examine their potential for bridging the language gap.

INTRODUCTION

21st-century society is characterized by an increasing demand for knowledge and abilities that connect with every sphere of human life. Among all of them, the linguistic and communicative ones arise as the main skills individuals must acquire and develop to become fully prepared to participate in the globalized world of today, a world full of social, economic, cultural and professional challenges to face.

Whereas it is clear that digital technologies can help improve the world at different scales, they also pose a number of challenges (Sorbe, Gal, Nicoletti & Timiliotis, 2019). For instance, they can contribute to both creating new professional opportunities and destroying certain employments due to the automatisation of routine tasks (Gal, Nicoletti, Renault, Sorbe & Timiliotis, 2019). As Sorbe, Gal, Nicoletti

& Timiliotis put it, "new technologies make it possible to automate an increasing share of tasks, and a key challenge is to enable the transition of displaced workers to new tasks, jobs, firms and sometimes industries" (2019, p. 19).

This situation has a clear effect on education, provoking what has been called *transnational education*, *borderless education* or *cross-border education*, three terms which refer to both the unprecedented growth in distance and e-learning education and the increasingly importance given to the international, intercultural, and global dimensions of education (Kosmützky & Putty, 2016; Leung & Waters, 2017).

At this juncture, the current educational context is shifting away from traditional approaches and to new technological paradigms (Sanz & Pantoja, 2015) required by the Information Society (or Network Society), which is characterized by the huge amount of information produced every day on the Internet (Muñoz, 2017). In this new educational context, modern society is demanding new approaches to language learning to guarantee European citizens are able to take part in the multilingual and multicultural world (Vassiliou & Šemeta, 2012).

Despite the attempts of educational bodies from all over the world, the economic and social disparities that affect quite negatively certain groups of the world's population, together with the increasing migrations, are expanding what has been defined as the language gap (Johnson, 2015), which implies social and academic disparities between social groups that is translated into both a lack of both linguistic proficiency and an inability to access to language itself of those of a low social group:

This notion of a "language gap" has become normalized to such an extent that some individuals from low-SES [socioeconomic-status] backgrounds have been led to believe that their ways of speaking to their children are responsible for, and can result in, academic failure. (Johnson & Zentella, 2017, p. 1)

In this sense, technology and digital competence seem to be powerful elements to bridge the language gap (Gómez & Huertas, 2019). ICT have been present at all educational levels for many years (Guri-Rosenblit, 2018), and even language classrooms cannot be understood without them nowadays (Tejada & Pozos, 2018); proof of this is the emergence of new technological and educational approaches and concepts such as Learning and Knowledge Technologies (LKT) and Technologies for Empowerment and Participation (TEP) (Reig, 2016). The former implies:

[…] orienting ICT towards more educational and training uses, for both teachers and students, with the main purpose of learning more and better. They aim at focusing on the methodology and on the actual uses of technology, and not only on ensuring the mastery of a series of digital tools. This evolution of the term implies that is a matter of know-how and evaluate the possible didactic uses that ICT have for the teaching and learning processes, exploring the use of the tools at the service of the acquisition of knowledge. (Huertas, 2017, p. 213)

LKT are basically the result of integrating ICT with teaching/learning processes, exploring possible didactic uses in knowledge building (Granados-Romero et al., 2014); in this sense, both teachers and learners must develop competences to use technology according to their role in it to ensure optimal learning and teaching (Valencia-Molina et al., 2016).

Similarly, Huertas (2017) defines TEP, a term deeply discussed by (Reig, 2012) as follows:

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