Editorial

Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in Extracurricular/Extramural Contexts

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Long gone are the times when the classroom was the sole venue for second or foreign language (L2) learning and the teacher was the main, or perhaps only, source of L2 input. Today, language learning often takes place also outside of institutional settings. In particular, this is true for L2 English, readily available online mainly through the media and the ever-growing entertainment industry. The Internet has also helped in making other languages more easily accessible, not to mention the possibilities it offers for authentic interaction in any target language (TL). This special issue focuses on computer-assisted language learning (CALL) in extracurricular and extramural contexts, where the former type of learning is somehow linked to institutions, but the latter is not.

In the early 1980s, Bialystok (1981) first highlighted the benefits of using the L2 outside school for learning, referring to such usage as functional practice. Thus, the phenomenon of learning outside of school/institutions is by no means new or unique to today’s world. Today, however, functional practice is possible for many more people, and it may in fact be an important part of everyday life. Recent research in the field of extracurricular/extramural L2 as a venue for language use and learning shows encouraging results. For instance, positive correlations between L2 digital gameplay and, for instance, lower affective barriers and willingness to communicate have been shown (Peterson, 2012; Reinders & Wattana, 2015). Thus, playing video games can be a type of extracurricular, or extramural, CALL activity. Another example is fan fiction,

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which has been shown to be an area with great potential for task-based learning (Sauro, 2014). Other studies report links between time spent watching TV/films in the TL and vocabulary acquisition (Webb & Rodgers, 2009). Relations between extramural English activities and L2 English proficiency have also been investigated among young learners in primary or secondary school, including those in Belgium (Kuppens, 2010), Finland (Piirainen-Marsh & Tainio, 2009), and Sweden (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2014; Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012). Altogether, these studies highlight the potential of extracurricular and extramural L2 for learning.

We would also like to stress the difference between extracurricular and extramural L2 from a theoretical point of view. As mentioned, extracurricular L2 is somehow connected to the educational setting in the pursuit of learning, for instance, in language clubs or evening schools. In contrast, extramural L2 corresponds to “L2 outside the walls;” that is, learners come in contact with or are involved in the L2 outside the walls of the classroom. This contact or involvement is not initiated by teachers; the initiative lies with the learner him/herself and is generally voluntary on the part of the learner. Closely related to the exposure to or use of extramural L2 are concepts such as incidental language learning (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001; Schmidt, 1994), unintentional learning (Forsman, 2004), implicit language learning (Ellis, 2009), out-of-class/school learning, and informal learning (Benson, 2011). In brief, while extramural L2 is unconnected to school and lies entirely with the individual, extracurricular L2 activities are associated with formal learning in school/institutions (for an in-depth discussion, see Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016). As shown in this volume, both can be of decisive importance for L2 learning.

We are excited about the content of this issue, which collects studies from across the world, treats different target languages, involves learners from primary to tertiary level, and thereby tackles CALL in various extracurricular and extramural settings from a range of perspectives. The first article, by Signe Hannibal Jensen, gives us insights into the lives of young L2 English learners in Denmark, a country where extramural English abounds. The participants are as young as eight and ten years old, and Hannibal Jensen maps their extramural English, showing that gaming, music, and TV are the most popular activities. Examining gaming in various language modes, significantly higher L2 English vocabulary scores were found for the children who reported playing video games with oral and written English input, and games with only written English input (compared to the participants who did not play such games). This suggests that the language mode afforded by different games is a relevant factor for vocabulary acquisition.
In their study of Japanese university students, Michael Rodgers and Stuart Webb zoom in on one particular form of extramural L2 activity: watching TV. Their participants watched ten episodes of *Chuck*, an American TV series likely to mirror one the participants themselves could have chosen to watch voluntarily in their free time. Previous research has shown that captions are beneficial for learning; however, Rodgers and Webb’s findings at least in part challenge those results. They found that, although captions may be useful for some purposes, both the group watching non-captioned episodes and the one watching the same episodes with captions made significant comprehension gains. Pedagogically, this means that even without captions, TV-watching may indeed contribute to language learning.

Using a Complex Adaptive System framework and adopting a usage-based grammar position, Kyle Scholz shows how numerous linguistic constructions developed in the TL as learners were engaged in playing World of Warcraft (WoW) in L2 German. In his article, Scholz convincingly takes us through the very complex nature of four specific learner trajectories in digital, interactive gameplay.

Donald Vosburg also uses WoW as a tool to investigate learners’ TL use. The L2 is again German, and learners interact with one another as well as native German speakers, who serve as language guides during gameplay. The study clearly shows the importance of group dynamics and shared interests (e.g., L2 learning or gaming) for the willingness to use the TL during gaming sessions.

Focusing specifically on online informal learning of English, Meryl Kusyk explores three university-level learners’ paths of L2 progress. Her findings underscore once again just how complex and nonlinear the process of L2 learning is.

In the final article, Se Yeong Yang and Youngjoo Yi show the potential learning benefits of extracurricular eTandem activities. They report on two participants, a Korean adult learning L2 English and a Korean-American adult learning L2 Korean, and their (re)negotiations of “selves” through these eTandem experiences in which they play the roles of both experts (in their L1s) and novices (in their L2s).

When reading these six articles, it becomes evident that CALL in extracurricular and extramural contexts plays a crucial role for many learners, regardless of where they are based or what their target language is. However, the complexities surrounding these contexts are also abundantly clear.

This issue is rounded out with a review by Daniel Walter of Rick Kern’s book *Language, Literacy, and Technology* and a Learning Technology Review of ReLANpro’s Bring Your Own Language Lab (BYOLL) by Jack Burston.
References


