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Distance CALL Online

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Summary

In this chapter a distinction is made between CALL and distance CALL (henceforth DCALL), two fields of activity often assumed to be overlapping. Two factors, one political and the other conceptual, contribute to the enduring nature of such an assumption. They relate, respectively, to the pressures that researchers in DCALL encounter when facing the politics of dissemination and publication, and to the conceptual confusion that is manifest in the terminology used to refer to distance learning. The first factor leads to under-articulation by DCALL researchers and practitioners of the unique features of their work, leaving space for misconceptions fed by the second. In order to dispel these misconceptions and to arrive at a definition of DCALL that accurately reflects the field and its neighbour, CALL, a brief discussion of the political background is offered in the rest of this Introduction. This is followed by a section in which the terminology of distance learning (henceforth DL) is clarified and the uniqueness of DL defined. Two further sections then address the implications that derive from this definition, introduce an integrated model of teaching and learning in DL and apply it to selected examples from the distance language learning literature. The chapter closes with considerations on current and future research directions.

Introduction

Blake (2009) concludes his review of DCALL as a body of publications by saying that DCALL 'draws heavily on previous research done in computer-assisted language learning (CALL)' (p. 822), a claim in need of qualification as will be argued in this chapter. DCALL is part of an academic dissemination and publishing pursuit, competing with other fields for exposure, and it is in that context that Blake's observation can best be understood. Borrowing from the approach that Coleman (2005) took when examining the status of CALL, this chapter is based on a review of specialized books, journals and conferences to determine the visibility of DCALL as a field. While Coleman's

conclusion shows a marginalization of CALL at the hands of the 'traditional' language research community, in the case of DCALL, the marginalization is perhaps more of a self-inflicted injury: indeed as pointed out by Degache and Depover (2010) the DCALL community in its emerging state two decades ago made some questionable choices. It chose to publish in already established CALL journals and conferences – for example in special issues such as *Language Learning & Technology* (2003), or in journals with a wider focus, for example, *Language Teaching Research* (2006), rather than to create its own instruments of dissemination, which would have required a deal of political and economic leverage, or to use the established vehicles of the DL research industry, which would have afforded insufficient exposure in language specialist circles. In the past decade, few DCALL submissions have found their way into DL publications or conferences.

In preparing this chapter, the outputs of 13 major DL journals published between 2006 and 2011 were analysed, a period chosen because it started with the appearance of White's (2006) state-of-the-art article on distance language learning research. It was found that only 42 papers from that corpus pertained to DCALL, out of over 2,000 articles. So, distance language writers are under-published in the literature of DL, while in order to be widely relevant to readers of the CALL literature, they have to minimize their distance specificities and maximize the aspects of their work that are transferable across both distance and presence settings. The launch of a dedicated DCALL journal is still a long way off, as is the establishment of a regular DCALL conference – with the exception, still without a sequel today, of the 2003 *Independent Language Learning Conference* at the UK Open University. Most writers in DCALL continue to submit to CALL conferences and publications. As for books, the only available monograph on our topic is White (2003), which deals with distance-language learning and includes coverage of technological mediation but encompasses other foci, as does the volume by Holmberg et al. (2005). The reluctance of DCALL researchers to publish in DL outlets and their tendency to minimize the specificities of DL when publishing in CALL outlets, to appeal to a less niche readership, do nothing to illuminate the identity of DCALL or to show how it has rooted itself in pedagogical concerns. This chapter elaborates on those areas.

What is distance CALL?

Terminological confusion

The confusion surrounding distance learning terminology has been noted by generic distance education writers (Guri-Rosenblit & Gro, 2011) and by language writers (Blake, 2009): what are the differences between *computer-assisted*, *flexible*, *open*, *supported*, *blended* and *e-learning*? A good source of disambiguation is Glikman (2002), who inspired the following terminological clarification.

First, there is no necessary association between DL and *computer-assisted* learning, since distance learners can be (and before the mid-1990s always were) served by other technologies such as print, sometimes enriched by analogue recording or broadcast technologies and the telephone. However, contemporary DL is delivered through digital technology, which may explain its popular image as futuristic education through virtual worlds and other 'advanced' gadgets. Second, there is no necessary association between DL and *online* learning either, since DL universities may not teach 100% online, but through a blend of digital, postal and face-to-face contact, for example, the UK Open University, the TÉLUQ in Québec or Queensland University of Technology. Third DL and *flexible* learning are also frequently confused but again, there is no necessary connection between the two. Flexible learning requires a set of conditions under which the learner's own time and place constraints play a major and explicit role in the institution's way of organizing teaching and learning. Yet in some regulated contexts such as corporate training or preparing students for national examinations with immovable schedules, such as at the Centre National d'Enseignement à Distance in France for example, DL may be practised with very little time flexibility. Another confusion is between the terms *distance* and *open*. They too sit in a complementary but non-necessary relationship. Open learning requires no academic qualifications of any sort as prerequisites for entry. Some institutions specify prerequisites (e.g., the FernUniversität in Germany or the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia in Spain), so they cannot be said to offer open learning although they are distance-teaching universities.

A further cause for confusion comes from the use of the term *supported*. Supported learning refers to settings where the activities are supported by teachers who accompany learners for a greater or lesser part of their study time, guiding those aspects of self-study that may offer unexpected problems and providing evaluation and feedback as well as affective support. Face-to-face education, with its physical presence of teachers in classrooms is always 'supported', and has no need of the term. But distance models are varied and those providing no support are not rare, making it important for the more learner-oriented institutions to stress the supported dimension of the services they offer. The notion of support also helps us understand what can be meant by 'courses taught entirely online'. For instance Blake (2008) argues that one reason for the paucity of DCALL research is that 'isolating the experimental treatment so as to focus on the medium alone (DL vs. Classroom instruction), to the exclusion of all other factors, remains a daunting, if not insurmountable, challenge' (p.113). This chapter suggests that it would be helpful if a distinction were not made between 'DL' and 'classroom instruction', but instead between supported fully online courses (which may offer online classroom instruction) and DL courses that are unsupported or minimally supported. Last in this catalogue, *e-learning* is often used interchangeably with distance learning, and covers so many different meanings – including all the above – as to be unusable as a descriptor, which is why it will not be used in this chapter.

A definition of distance learning

Given the plethora of DL models – from fully-distance-based, in specialist distance institutions, to partially-distance-based, in conventional institutions running distance projects – Glikman (2002) suggests that a program counts as DL if ‘the *bulk* of knowledge transmission, or of learning, is undertaken outside of a direct, face-to-face, relationship between co-present teachers and learners’ (p. 19, original italics, my translation). Contrary to rival definitions based on lack of co-presence (Schulte & Krämer, 2008) or lack of classroom contact (Blake, 2009), Glikman’s formulation is invulnerable to the counterargument that co-presence can happen online and classroom contact too, thanks to synchronous learning environments. Instead she draws attention to an institutional dimension of DL: once it is understood that in DL the *bulk* of the learning takes place in non-co-presence, then it can be seen that consequences follow for the DL institution, learner and teacher. In a DL setting defined in this way, the bulk of the contact is mediated by digital or older technologies. For language schools in such settings it follows that face-to-face interaction – traditionally a main ingredient of language programs – can only be a supplementary activity, in some cases a non-compulsory one. Alternative ways therefore have to be found of providing learners with the learning advantages afforded by face-to-face interaction. In language learning programs they comprise: synchronous interactive-speaking opportunities for fluency development, listening opportunities under synchronous conditions for listening strategy development, quasi-immediate progress monitoring and feedback by the teacher in written and spoken forms. Lastly but very importantly for distance learners who may never meet their peers physically, ways need to be found to integrate the students into a community of language learners. In early distance learning of languages (1880s to mid-1990s) all these experiences were necessarily absent, but as early as the mid-1990s, DCALL was mobilized to address such difficulties (Jegade & Gooley, 1994) and it has been most successful where it has been used within systemic educational designs that have the specific needs of distance learners built into their core, as will be elaborated shortly.

In a perspective that sees bulk of non-co-presence as the distinguishing criterion between DL and other formats, what then is the position of *blended* learning? According to Nicolson, Southgate and Murphy (2011) blended learning refers to ‘a combination of forms of instructional technology, including traditional forms of learning used in conjunction with web-based, online approaches’ (p. 6). Because ‘blends may cover a wide spectrum ranging from those at the simpler end, combining a couple of delivery options, print materials and telephone conferencing, for example, to more complex combinations’ (ibid.), it is difficult to see blended learning as a mix of particular technologies. A more helpful way of looking at it is by focusing on the teaching and learning dimension of blends:

For example, in some cases, conventional classroom teaching of new material is complemented by opportunities for practice through online activity. In others,

particularly in distance and open settings, new material may be presented in self-study resources, while language practice and reinforcement are offered via teacher-facilitated sessions either online or in a face-to-face classroom. (Nicolson et al., 2011, p. 7)

In this perspective the notion of *blend* retains definitional usefulness: the balance between self-study and co-present as well as non-co-present supported time is what determines whether a blend is part of a DL model or a traditional one.

In sum, although *distance* learning should be clearly distinguished from *flexible* and from *open* learning, research has long confirmed that best practice in DL does involve degrees of flexibility and openness even though there are DL organizations across the world where these criteria are not meshed harmoniously or not met at all. Indeed in the history of distance pedagogies evidence of vastly variable quality can be found (Jonassen et al., 1995). When later in this chapter practices and issues that are specific to distance CALL are identified, the distance element will be understood to include a degree of flexible and open learning within a supported model.

A disciplinary identity for DCALL

Some of the tenets of DL for languages simply reflect sound educational thinking. They overlap with those which guide practice in co-present formats; others apply to all distance learning whether in languages or other disciplines; others still are specific to distance *language* learning. These disciplinary overlaps may be visualized in Figure 8.1.

Figure 8.1 displays a central area with single hatchings (representing the overlap between generic DL and DCALL) and one with cross-hatchings (representing the overlap between DCALL and CALL). Typical of the single-hatched area are universal

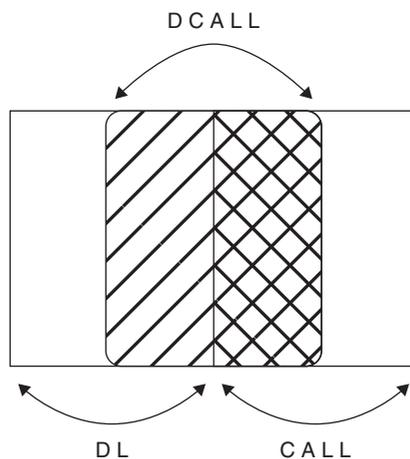


FIGURE 8.1 *The relationship of DL with DCALL and CALL.*

DL issues, such as diagnostic self-testing on entry or expectation management, which have a relevance for language learning but are not unique to it, as against other distance issues applicable only to other disciplines, for example equipment-loaning policies in the sciences (which therefore belongs to the clear area to the left of the figure).

This chapter is concerned with issues in the cross-hatched section of the figure. In order to better understand what they are, that is which elements of DCALL differ from CALL, it is useful to first consider the role of integration in the design of distance learning, both in general and for languages.

An integrated model of distance language learning

In distance organizations education is delivered on an industrial scale (Glikman, 2005) but with a concern to ensure individual support, because DL institutions know from retention figures that individualization is a factor in the successful completion of studies. This tension between 'one-size-fits-all' economics and personal attention is mitigated through the development of student autonomy and is embodied in the two features that pervade DL systems: batteries of tools for students to self-train in the use of language school services, for greater economies of scale; and, more relevantly for our discussion in this chapter, the integration into the materials and processes of detailed and *explicit* rationales for everything that students are invited to do – from the macro level of curriculum choices down to the micro level of individual language exercises and tests. Furthermore, integrated with this is the *flexible* provision of alternative forms of learning for a range of student circumstances. *Explicit* and *flexible* are thus two keywords that will be developed shortly. *Integrated*, as Murphy and Hurd (2011) rightly insist, is the third keyword here, since catering for different needs and circumstances involves 'not simply a collection of different ways of reaching the same goals for learners to choose between, but rather the *integration* of different modes' (p. 49, original emphasis).

White (2003) is right to draw attention to 'the need for complementary perspectives in conceptualizing distance learning' (p. 86). Those who have articulated these perspectives have shown how important systemicity is in DL. Whether it be White's 'learner-context interface', a construct which sees 'the establishment of an effective interface between each learner and his or her learning context [as] the crucible for distance language learning' (ibid.) or whether it be Blake's (2008) encouragement to the DCALL profession 'to tailor the curriculum to individual student readiness and potential, to make learning goals and paths clear, to link inquiries to genuine problems to enhance motivation, and to provide prompt constructive feedback' (p.126), clearly best-practice in DL involves struggling to counter isolation and separateness. There is therefore, according to these experts, a recognition that distance CALL should be a highly integrated activity. A representation of how distance systems can offer integration and balance is offered in Figure 8.2 and is followed by a commentary.

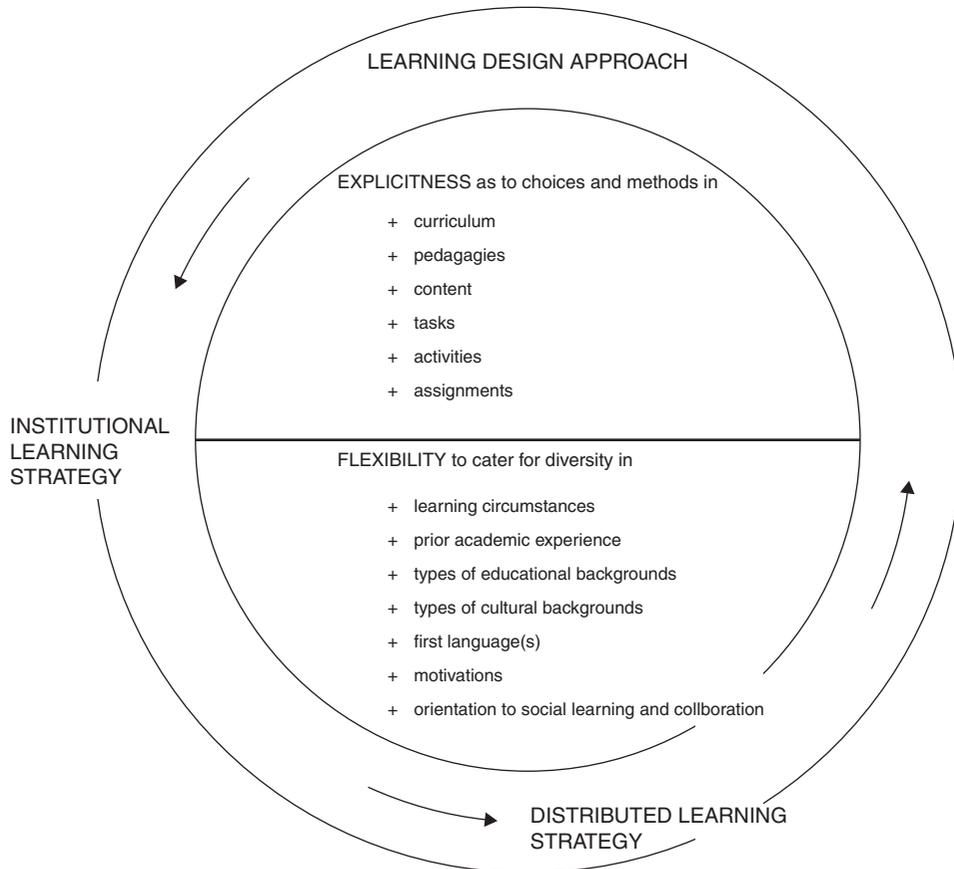


FIGURE 8.2 A system for supported distance language learning.

The leading concerns of a distance educator are to be as *explicit* and as *flexible* as possible. When studying at a distance and in isolation, learners need most of all for the learning processes to be totally transparent: there is no-one to ask for help if they stumble on an obstacle. Consequently, running through all aspects of the learning experience is the criterion of explicitness (top semi-circle in Figure 8.2). The other key characteristic of the distance learning public is its heterogeneity: it is made up of learners from all age groups and all walks of life, hence the importance of building in flexibility (bottom semi-circle) into all aspects of the program so that the learner's experience is optimal whatever her or his circumstances. In order to ensure that both explicitness and flexibility are built into the DL model and maintained throughout the phases of the creation of courses, from design through to delivery, three types of resource must be available, represented in the outer ring of Figure 8.2: a learning design approach, an institutional learning strategy and a distributed learning environment.

A learning design approach is defined by Conole (2009) as 'a means of formally representing (and thus reusing) learning sequences' (p. 580). By formally representing

them in detail, course designers clarify them and make it easier for materials authors and tutors to be explicit with students about the purpose and manner of study. Further, by designing them for reuse, designers respond to the requirements inherent in DL as a mass education mode. A learning design approach involves networking within teams, which – in well-resourced cases – may include not only materials authors, tutors and developmental-tester learners, but also educational technologists, Web editors and audio-visual Web-asset producers.

Second, a teaching and learning strategy, which informs decision-making across the DL institution, will if well-disseminated to staff and backed up by management in a facilitative (rather than micro-managing fashion), allow a languages school to frame its curriculum, study materials, communications resources, assessment instruments and learner support mechanisms in ways compatible with institutional resources and cultures.

Finally, a distributed learning environment, that is, one which can support learning wherever and on whatever machine the learner's needs determine, should be provided. This may involve well-resourced arrays of tools or humbler arrangements combining postal delivery with telephone support. Whatever the educational technology choices, Sclater (2011) observes that 'we only see significant adoption of technologies for teaching and learning when they are already commoditised' (n.p.). By the time that commoditized stage is reached (e.g., when ownership of a Smartphone is no longer an eccentricity but is widespread) the learning and teaching can be designed so as to be applied to Smartphones in addition to those machines already used by students. The commoditized technology is not leading the learning, but it is added to the panoply at the point where it has become a sufficiently important part of the distributed environment and can accompany students flexibly through their social and academic lives. In contrast, in less well-served countries, the distributed environment may exclude personal machines but include cybercafés (45.2% of students at a Nigerian university obtain access that way, according to Jagboro, 2003). The learning design then also needs to take into account the cultures of those locales for example, the cultural taboos on women using them (Gunawardena et al., 2009).

These three resources, learning design approach, institutional strategy and distributed learning environment, each has a role to play in the maintenance of an ethos of explicitness and flexibility. To illustrate this, it may help to imagine that the inner and outer rings of Figure 8.2 rotate so that certain points can be lined up with each other, somewhat like an orienteering compass: for example, a distributed learning environment is a relevant resource to cope with the required flexibility (e.g., students with different needs may need to study using different devices) but if the outer rings rotate 180 degrees, it can also be seen as a resource in the learning design. Similarly, an institutional learning and teaching strategy must be in place to ensure support for the activities going on in learning design. Equally, the institutional strategy should support the flexibility required by the diversity of student profiles (such as providing materials equally suitable for learners with no disabilities as for those with sight-impairment or dyslexia, or again varying the presentation of materials so that they enable equal

achievement of learning goals by less proficient as by more proficient language learners registered together on a given module). Together, the three resources form an integrated system that should perhaps structure most forms of teaching, but is an indispensable ingredient in modes where the bulk of the learning is carried out without co-presence.

DVAL **research seen through the integrated model**

Ironically, investigations of language learners and DL systems have not been systematic. Rather, it is once again in generic DL research that systemic views are articulated. However, some examples can be found that relate to distance language learning. The following selection will give an insight into these practices and their relationship to the integrated model, thus providing an answer to the question that arose from the discussion of Figure 8.1, about which elements of DCALL are different from CALL.

Learning design issues

Open-source VLEs allow developers to customize or create modules and features. Some DCALL research has highlighted the relationship between this technology, pedagogy and learner needs, and has been able to inform the planning of distance courses. For example, Shield and Kukulska-Hulme (2006) studied pedagogical and external websites that were recommended to learners in their DCALL studies and identified two components of website usability: pedagogical usability (Is the practice of multimodal communication on websites a facilitator or inhibitor of progress in L2 communication?) and intercultural usability (How do members of Culture A interpret the Web interface and icon styles of Culture B?). Another example is Stickler and Hampel (2010) and their case study on the use of a Moodle-based virtual learning environment including wikis for collaboration and blogs for reflective learning. Distance learners were registered on an online language course with a design combining different approaches. Findings showed a link between students' choice of tools and their learning preferences (e.g., focus on form or communication; preference for written or spoken language) thus contributing to decisions that would shape the distributed environment for future iterations of the course.

In DCALL the penalty for faulty design can be heavy: remote, isolated learners whose learning is impeded or halted by design issues cannot obtain immediate help, nor can designers intervene swiftly to recast pedagogical orientations that have been explicitly described for the learners in the self-study materials already released to them. Both the above studies exemplify the extent of the scrutiny under which the learning and technological designs must come in order to ensure that the environmental and pedagogical resources in the integrated model actually mesh. Both studies also show how to frame this scrutiny within the context of our particular discipline.

Flexibility as to study circumstances

The following three studies of mobile devices create a three-way link between the study circumstances, the learner's experiences and the technology. While podcast-based teaching can be studied in the context of general CALL for the benefits it may bring to skills development (Ducate & Lomicka, 2009), the DCALL researcher looks for additional dimensions, such as the technology's potential for maximizing isolated learners' learning opportunities. Thus Edirisingha et al. (2007) derived a model of learner support through podcast use which afforded both formal and informal learning, the latter being accessed through peer knowledge, which is a plentiful resource among the adult audiences typical of DL. Some less successful projects were reviewed by Rosell-Aguilar (2009), who studied literature on the use of podcasts for language learning. Many students in these studies choose to work with podcasts through their institution's VLE rather than subscribe to RSS feeds, which 'would appear to contradict some of the potential benefits of podcasting . . . (e.g., portability, attractiveness, learning on the move, informality' (p. 27). The author wondered whether the explanation lay in the lack of integration between course design and the different environments involved:

[m]any of the files were embedded within a VLE where students had to complete activities based on the media resources. If students have to listen to a piece of audio to prepare for an activity or lecture or complete activities based on it, why would they de-contextualize that audio and transfer it to a portable device? (ibid.)

He also reminded the reader that podcasts have a characteristic which differentiates them from ordinary audio files: they form regularly updated series, encouraging extended listening over time. He found that this feature was not exploited either. In these cases, flexibility of environment had been considered, but the learning design failed to exploit the affordances of this environment. In contrast, an intervention study by Demouy and Kukulka-Hulme (2010) specifically focused on such affordances. They set up an experiment comparing two groups of 35 distance learners. Group 1 was asked to carry out listening and speaking activities on mobile phones; Group 2 carried out listening activities on MP3 player and iPods and could then practise the speaking closely related to those listening tracks on their computer with the course DVD-Rom. The researchers found that Group 1

engaged with the project activities in a variety of settings. 'Other' locations included at work, in the streets or public spaces, in hotel rooms, at the beach or at a supermarket. The majority of participants indicated that they were doing something else whilst listening to the clips. This usually meant travelling (with public transport scoring an average of 36% and driving 12% over the six-week period) or exercising (walking 45%, jogging 15%) ranking higher in the choices available. By comparison, Group 2 responses show a marked preference for working with the project's activities at home. (Demouy et al., 2010, p. 222)

The authors concluded that 'interactive speaking activities are not done easily in public places, in front of others or while doing something else. Participants generally chose to do them at home. They rarely managed to find a "quiet" spot or time to try out an activity outside their home' (p. 228). With a local institutional policy that encourages mobile learning, and a distributed environment that includes all the above devices, it is particularly important, as the research shows, that the learning design should be constructed in full consideration of the learners' real experiences with, and preferred uses of, the technological environment.

In the integrated model discussed earlier, the institution also plays a role in supporting students in their particular study circumstances. There is only one report to date on the effect of an institutional learning strategy on DCALL: Hopkins' (2010) work on assessment at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC). Whereas from its inception in 1994 the all-online UOC excluded synchronous activity because its busy students could not be expected to attend online events at set times, the English department fought to show that real-time interactivity based on collaborative tasks was important to language learning. Having demonstrated through research the willingness of UOC students to engage with synchronous online learning, Hopkins and colleagues were able to modify the direction of the institutional strategy and the UOC now offers synchronous activities. Their innovative approach to oral assessment exemplifies DCALL research, in that while CALL inspired the principles that underpinned the construction of the assessment, the particular DCALL contribution is to have embedded those in a scheme that took full notice both of the institutional constraints and of the students' circumstances. Specifically, the tests involved discussions in which students worked in small groups towards a negotiated consensus through oral interactions triggered by a scenario. No tutors or assessors were present at the test itself, which was student-led and recorded for later marking. Hopkins explains the dual rationale that determined this choice:

The autonomous, student-led nature of the tasks responded in part to practical issues of timetabling and the impossibility of instructors attending the sessions of all of their students. In addition, in light of previous research findings regarding the general teacher centeredness of the interaction in [Synchronous Audiographic Conferencing] environments discussed previously, a further aim was to explore a situation in which the teacher's role was not that of session leader, but rather post-session observer and provider of feedback. (p. 238)

Additionally the research discovered a further reason why the method fitted well with DL and its focus on student self-management: some students had found listening to the recording of the assessed speaking activity useful. According to one of them 'The fact that you can listen to yourself afterwards is very positive and you become aware of your errors, your pronunciation, etc' (ibid., p. 249). While the assessment designers can be credited with bringing about the educational benefits and student satisfaction levels reported by Hopkins, it is clear that the UOC's willingness to change its policy

in favour of an innovation such as a non-staffed synchronous summative test has also been key, underlining again the need for systemic approaches if DL practices are to flourish.

Previous academic experience

The following study is a good example of DCALL research and development, in that the authors understand DLs' preoccupation with the diversity of academic experience which is characteristic of open learning cohorts. Although this is a generic distance learner characteristic, the authors' proposals for addressing it are specifically contextualized to language learning and technology. Ros I Solé and Mardomingo (2004) designed a multiple-pathways Web-based project for cultural learning for L2 learners of Spanish. The design offered distance students varying degrees of scaffolding through the pathways (or 'trajectories') depending on how confident they felt with both the medium and the language. Having self-selected a 'trajectory', students were then automatically guided through the tasks with the degree of scaffolding that matched their proficiency, based on self-assessment. Findings were encouraging but suggested that further support was needed to help students select realistically (which in most cases meant not underestimating their own strengths).

Previous educational cultures

Doherty (2009) proves by counterexample that a DCALL learning design that pays scant attention to prior learning cultures will fail, particularly if it coincides with a similarly monocultural strategy on the part of the institution. She presents a study of what she calls 'assessment trouble' on a distance MBA administered by an Australian university through the medium of English, with an enrolment of advanced L2 speakers of English (Malaysian and Chinese) studying alongside L1 Australian peers. The L2 cohort soon starts expressing a high degree of anxiety on the course forum about the nature of the course assessment. The Australian cohort, less vocal in the forum discussions (41% of all such queries for two thirds of the enrolments), seems to implicitly understand the tutor's account of the institution's assessment requirements. He posts to the forum that students are expected to produce an assignment that is 'professionally presented with appropriate use of headings and sub-headings [for which the] precise format is up to the individual student' (p. 141). As a result, the L2 cohort's questions intensify, ranging from word limits and document formatting to interpretation of the wording in the advice offered: 'Is it possible for you to clarify in more specifics' or, again, 'I've a few problems trying to understand what I'm supposed to touch on' (ibid., p. 141). Finally, the tutor offers to post an example 'on the understanding that it is not a "model" but only an example' (ibid., p. 142). Analysing the fresh 'stream of trouble' (ibid., p. 143) that greets this initiative, Doherty observes that the L2 cohort has 'limited experience of the norms in the Australian university sector [where they were] positioned as guests'

(ibid., p. 141), in contradiction to the University's marketing discourse that promoted the course as one international online community. Australian students faced with the same instructions, on the other hand were able to decode the tutor's guidelines.

In terms of the integrated model discussed earlier, then, the troubles in this case can be mapped to weaknesses in the learning design. There was insufficient explicitness about the assessment procedures, and insufficient (or even nil) account was taken of the prior educational cultures of the L2 speakers. Arguably, further weaknesses lay in the distributed learning environment (e.g., reducing communication to an asynchronous forum when synchronous teleconferencing might have been more useful in helping with linguistic disambiguation) and in the institutional strategy (which legitimized only one assessment model).

Motivation and anxiety

The identification of linguistic activities and contents suitable for study times when full attention is engaged, and others when attention or motivation are lower, is arguably something that generic CALL should encourage. Language studies, with their mix of skills-based and content-based work, times of lone reflection and times of communication with others, can be seen as particularly well suited to variations in learning routines. Yet no CALL research on this topic has come to light in the preparation of this chapter. In DCALL, in contrast, motivation is an increasingly researched field. The design of DL materials plays a role in motivation maintenance. For example Murphy and Hurd (2011) have specific recommendations for pacing the material so as to minimize moments of low motivation. They also illustrate the need to provide learners with the content and technological resources that allow them to exercise motivation monitoring themselves 'and become aware of the decisions [about their learning that] they can and should be making' (p. 56).

Concerning anxiety, a few studies of emotions around language performance are now also available (Bown & White 2010; Pichette, 2009). Yet papers with a specific focus on these affective issues as they play out within a digitally mediated DL format are harder to find, although two examples are Ozdener and Satar's (2008) study on affect in the use of text and voice chat, and de los Arcos et al. (2009) reporting on emotions in audiographic conferencing. These authors identified ways in which the medium respectively heightened and diminished certain types of emotion in learners attending regular online tutorials with peers and tutors whom they have never met.

Current and future directions

In her state-of-the-art review of ten years of distance language learning White (2006) found that by that point in the new century, three broad topics had emerged as priorities for distance language researchers: 'the process of choosing technology in particular

sociocultural contexts, the contribution of “low-end” technologies, and the potential and contribution of new learning environments’ (pp. 254–5).

In light of the priorities that she saw emerging in 2006, this chapter concludes with a look at the issues that occupy DCALL researchers today. To that effect, a corpus of research and theses from the UK Open University published in 2010 and 2011 or in press at the time of writing was examined. 54 studies were found to belong to DCALL, covering the following topics (in descending order of number of publications): multimodality (8); knowing more about learners, their characteristics and contexts (8); online teaching and teacher training (7); autonomy (4); motivation (4); emotions and anxiety (4); intercultural issues (4); mobile learning (4); task design (3); beginners (3); the speaking skill (1); collaboration (1); feedback (1); assessment (1); and Open Educational Resources for teachers (1). The top seven items on the list may be seen as priority activities for DCALL, as follows.

The first one is multimodality, a field which has become important to DCALL in the last ten years, as the mediation of distance learning has been able to take place via ever more sophisticated digital platforms. Understanding interaction in these environments (Hampel, *in press*; Hampel & Stickler, *in press*; Mirza & Lamy, 2010), learner competence (Hauck, 2010) and methodologies for researching multimodal interactions (Lamy, 2012; Lamy & Flewitt, 2011) make up three productive strands of multimodality research.

The joint top-ranking category (knowing more about learners) is driven by a key feature of DCALL mentioned earlier on in the chapter, that is, being flexibly responsive to the wide variety of DL audiences, for example to learner diversity (Adams & Nicolson, 2011), to learner characteristics and how they link to attainment (Coleman & Furnborough, 2010) or to learner preferences (Stickler & Hampel, 2010).

The training of online distance teachers of languages has been an object of research for nearly two decades and is likely to continue so, as teachers have to cyclically adapt their teaching to evolving technology settings, and institutions need to better understand the implications for teacher workloads and rewards. New issues for DCALL teachers in blended formats are discussed in Nicolson et al. (2011), Beaven et al. (2010), Comas-Quinn (2011), Gallardo et al. (2011), and in Guichon and Hauck’s (2011) special issue of *ReCALL*.

Research on motivation has been mentioned earlier. Together with research on autonomy (Murphy & Hurd, 2011) and on emotions (Kukulska-Hulme & de los Arcos, 2011) it is key to retention of distance learners and can be predicted to be a continuing priority in the future.

In DCALL, intercultural research has placed less emphasis on telecollaboration than has been the case in CALL more generally. This may be due to the demographic profile of distance learners (generally older, with more accumulated life experiences including travel, and therefore in need of a different approach to ‘developing intercultural awareness’ than younger audiences). There may also be some reluctance on the part of distance course designers to involve their learners in periods of contact with a second remote community, given the time that learners already devote to connecting

with their primary remote community, that is, their tutors and peers. However, specific approaches to intercultural learning for distance audiences are a live research topic, including, recently, intercultural development in adult European beginners learning Chinese at a distance (Álvarez, 2011; Álvarez & Kan, in press).

Finally, research into mobile language learning in distance contexts (Kukulska-Hulme, 2010) has two different rationales, as seen earlier. One is the need, in DL, for as close a fit as possible with the adult learner's personal technologies of choice, the other predominantly relates to teachers of English in the compulsory school sector in under-served countries, and has more of an inclusion agenda (Power & Shrestha, 2010). The research aims within the former can be so varied, the needs of the two sectors so different and the technology itself so ubiquitous and versatile that the time may have come when the label 'mobile learning' is no longer an accurate descriptor, whether in distance or co-present formats, while the practice itself continues to follow the technology and to provide new objects for research.

However, to remain true to the avoidance of technological determinism which has guided the writing of this chapter, a more cultural note should be sounded in conclusion: DCALL overlaps but is not co-terminous with CALL and instead has specific concerns related to distance, openness, flexibility and support for learners. Distance teaching and learning of languages is now a mature field, albeit as mentioned earlier, still facing the task of establishing its own dissemination territories. Through their continuing endeavour to scrutinize, document and address the challenges of remote language learning and teaching, DCALL practitioners bring valuable pedagogical and design insights into the thinking of the CALL community at large.

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