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CALL in a Social Context: Reflecting on Digital Equity, Identity, and Interaction in the Post-COVID Age

Abstract

Purpose – Following education's recent and abrupt reliance on technology-mediated pedagogies, the novel coronavirus pandemic has, in many instances, highlighted the unpreparedness of learning institutions worldwide to implement effective online instruction. While practical quality considerations include content delivery, teacher training, equipment provision, and networked infrastructure, the situated and enculturated means by which online language education occurs represents a learner-focused factor that language educators may inadvertently neglect as they struggle to accommodate an emerging digital frontier.

Design/methodology/approach – In focusing on learner equity, identity, and interaction, the current conceptual paper draws attention to potential affective factors driving computer-assisted language learning (CALL) participation structures, providing sociological consideration of the potential impacts of digital language education and, in doing so, confront the deterministic notion that online language learning represents a general equaliser of hierarchical participation structures.

Findings – While CALL's dynamic nature *does* provide users with openings to revise linguistic, semiotic, and social practices, a growing body of research contests the broad depiction of digital language learning as *automatically* strengthening learner equity and interaction. Euphoric visions of technology inexorably engendering positive outcomes thereby risk obscuring those sociocultural pressures that impact user identity and, thus, how diverse social actors interact within unfamiliar learning communities.

Originality – This conceptual article is amongst a select few that focuses on CALL quality assurance during COVID-induced online education.

Keywords: CALL; COVID-19; learner identity; educational technologies; second language acquisition; foreign language acquisition.

Introduction

Following recent global events, the relationship between education and technology is as extensive as it is interdisciplinary, with the utilisation of networked devices during the transfer of knowledge, learning, and communication presently viewed as a requisite feature of instruction. Thus, there is an accompanying expectation that students possess the digital competencies necessary for remote learning and, from an internal quality assurance standpoint, practitioners to accommodate and continuously adapt to a convergence of practice, theory, and reflection, irrespective of their previous exposure to educational technologies. This praxis-oriented approach is particularly ubiquitous in the domains of foreign and second language acquisition (FLA and SLA, respectively), where an expansion in online pedagogies has fundamentally revised not only the procedures by which learners navigate diverse sociolinguistic settings but the boundaries in which language education departments struggle to deliver innovative change and improvement.

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Indeed, the abrupt, COVID-19-induced turn to digitally-mediated instruction has caught many institutions off-guard, with the forced utilisation of technology as a means of preventing disruptions to scheduling and learning objectives concealing general unpreparedness to adapt to an emerging digital frontier (Colpitts *et al.*, 2020). Despite “online teacher preparation experiences [being] vital for teacher preparation to meet the demands of educating children and adolescents in the digital age” (Rice and Deschaine, 2020, p. 115), previous studies indicate that language practitioners generally lack exposure to—and, as a consequence, a willingness to implement—technology-centred pedagogies. A 2015 report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) notes the average percentage of technology usage during FLA drilling and practice to be 17.8% across all member nations, while the utilisation of computers for group work and communication averages 22.8% (p. 52). From this perspective, styles of training and instruction have, until recent events, trailed an inescapable logic of “traditional” designs, with educational technology more commonly positioned as an “ancillary tool or even an optional toy” (Rice and Deschaine, 2020, p. 119).

Notwithstanding the doxic estrangement between technology and formal SLA/FLA, digital language education, commonly referred to as computer-assisted language learning (CALL), remains, at the time of writing, the current vehicle for SLA/FLA content delivery, cultural exchange, and learner interactivity as emergency education measures persist. Following the foundational definition by Richards and Schmidt (2010), CALL manifests as a dynamic *approach* that harnesses “the use of a computer in the teaching or learning of a second or foreign language” (p. 110). From this perspective, CALL incorporates a range of networked technologies that connect learners to linguistic content, including multimedia, the Internet, video conferencing, smartphones, and tablets. Despite this growing ubiquity, however, the rushed and often disjointed response to COVID-19-induced online instruction (Colpitts *et al.*, 2020; Maican and Cocoradă, 2021) confirms Beatty’s (2010) conviction that CALL remains an immature and somewhat reactionary paradigm, frequently understood in terms of its reactivity to technological and, in the present circumstance, *societal* stimuli.

From a quality assurance perspective, the “differentiated, situated, and enculturated ways in which digital practices happen” (Snyder and Prinsloo, 2007, p. 173) represents one factor that departments may, perhaps, overlook as they struggle to accommodate remote language learning. Nevertheless, securing a critical awareness of the processes by which digital education impacts the learner’s affective situatedness and perception of the self remains a

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4 crucial endeavour, most notably when attempting to facilitate socially equitable learning
5 domains (Cutrim Schmid, 2006; Ortega and Zyzik, 2008). While research into the impact of
6 COVID-19 on digital interactivity and learner emotion remains at an embryonic stage, early
7 findings indicate “significant differences in students’ connection with other students and
8 teachers” (Baltà-Salvador *et al.*, 2021) and “negative emotional valence regarding the
9 instructional format, attributed to mixed and changing emotions with adjusting to online
10 learning” (Espino *et al.*, 2021, p. 334). Thus, rather than functioning as a panacea for
11 emergency language instruction, CALL holds the potential to *amplify* negative affective
12 outcomes.
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20 Drawing on a community-centred interpretation of CALL, this article actively rejects
21 instrumental-deterministic readings of technology, whereby participation in online learning
22 networks and, indeed, the usage of technology itself is viewed without connection to broader,
23 often implicit, social undercurrents (Feenberg, 1992). Such images de-contextualise
24 educational technologies, removing them from their socio-historical embeddedness and the
25 processes by which online practice shapes, *and is shaped by*, the physical world. In referencing
26 CALL’s impact on learner equity, identity, and interaction, this conceptual article intends to
27 highlight a seemingly overlooked feature of digital quality assurance and, in doing so, draw
28 attention to the social dynamics by which online learning impacts not only the absorption and
29 transfer of language but often, conceptualisations of the self within a fundamentally
30 transcultural digital space.
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39 **Background**

40 *41 Problematising Pre-COVID-19 Digital Language Education*

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44 As indicated by Colpitts *et al.* (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic “continues to cause
45 unprecedented disruption to the global order, impacting both the public and private sectors
46 across a host of disparate industries, including manufacturing, commerce, tourism and
47 education.” This upheaval is particularly evident in the domains of SLA and FLA, with both
48 synchronous and asynchronous online instruction emerging as a crisis-response strategy as
49 language learning practitioners struggle to adapt to the severance of face-to-face contact. At
50 the time of the COVID-19 outbreak, CALL had maintained a near-seventy-year presence in
51 the field of language education; yet, practitioners were seemingly reticent to incorporate digital
52 tools within classrooms, with preference given to “safer” pedagogical approaches (Smith and
53 Kim, 2017). Against this background, widespread unpreparedness for the demand for digital
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3 language education at the beginning of the pandemic “offered teachers little time to redesign
4 lessons, adapt materials and find engaging methods, so as to ensure efficient language learning
5 and create a positive teaching and learning environment” (Maican and Cocoradă, 2021, p. 2).
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9 Yet, CALL remains an extensive learning context distinct from traditional face-to-face
10 settings (Rice and Deschaine, 2020). A lack of exposure to digital language instruction thereby
11 presents a significant obstacle to effective practice, with previous research indicating that
12 teacher readiness for online instruction correlates directly with the degree and quality of
13 technology-based training (Alshumaimeri, 2008). Thus, from a quality assurance perspective,
14 a systematic review of existing literature is required in order to sustain and enhance the quality,
15 equity, and efficiency of CALL provision. This article problematises the current digital
16 SLA/FLA landscape from an equity-identity-interaction standpoint, whereby “technologies
17 and practices generate power through materials and objects as well as through human actions
18 and meaning-making” (Hinkelman and Gruba, 2012, p. 47). Here, virtual communities are
19 spaces of complex, multifaceted interactions; more pointedly, “they are places where intensive
20 social, cognitive, and cultural mediation occurs as knowledges and subjectivities meet, cross,
21 and resist one another” (Kumpulainen and Sefton-Green, 2014, p. 8). Thus, this review calls
22 for practitioners to adopt a socially-inclusive perspective that situates learners not as de-
23 contextualised individuals, but active, diverse participants in collaborative learning networks.
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35 *The Three Phases of CALL*

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38 Both Yang (2010) and Smith and McCurrach (2021) observe that digital language
39 education’s theoretical and functional basis has transformed dramatically across three distinct
40 phases. In its initial *behaviouristic* iteration, CALL exploited computers to deliver firmly linear,
41 form-based exercises, necessitating the completion of branched linguistic input sequences that
42 gradually increased in complexity. The delivery of positive or negative feedback was
43 instantaneous and consistent with learner accuracy, embodying a structuralist model
44 emphasising the utility of repetition to language learning. From this perspective, behaviouristic
45 CALL manifests per an instrumentalist “mechanical tutor” design, where the second or foreign
46 language is acquired through the “explicit teaching of grammar by utilising linear and repetitive
47 drill-and-practice techniques via the grammar-translation method” (Smith and Kim, 2017, p.
48 324). Nonetheless, progresses in pedagogical and technological methods have since modified
49 not only the usage of CALL but the philosophical stance dictating its design.
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4 Consistent with the communicative approach to language teaching, Kern and
5 Warschauer (2000) note the cognitivist-orientated, *communicative* phase of CALL as
6 emphasising linguistic function over form and of learners exploiting internal linguistic
7 schemata, as opposed to predetermined fragments of the target language. In this respect,
8 communicative CALL reverses the computer-as-tutor metaphor, viewing digital resources “as
9 things to be controlled by, rather than controlling learners” (Yang, 2010, p. 909). The
10 communicative phase interprets learning as an actively developed process, realised via the
11 navigation, discovery, and adaptation of linguistic forms (Warschauer and Healey, 1998).
12 Accordingly, communicative attempts at digital language instruction stress the criticality of
13 learner interactions within SLA/FLA in order to promote variable target language practice,
14 reciprocal dialogue, and high-order cognition.
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23 In its current *integrative* form, meanwhile, CALL embodies a socio-cognitivist turn
24 (Smith and McCurrach, 2021, p. 87), whereby the mode of interaction shifts from local
25 engagement with digital tools to glocal *participation* in computer-mediated communication
26 (CMC) via networked devices. The integrative paradigm thereby extends and adjusts
27 communicative CALL, presenting a convergence of communicative and technology-mediated
28 language instruction driven chiefly by advancements in digital infrastructure, i.e., the Internet
29 (Beatty, 2010). Integrative CALL materialises via what Selwyn (2017) labels “networking
30 logic” (p. 15), in which CMC-ready devices, including phones, tablets, and personal computers,
31 synchronously and asynchronously connect students to linguistic content and, more
32 significantly, native-speaking *users*. If implemented correctly, networked technologies allow
33 learners to transcend the traditional physical boundaries of education, reformatting CALL into
34 a peer-supported dynamic site of cross-cultural exchange (Yang, 2010).
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44 **Conceptual Lens: Community-Based CALL**

45 As noted by Ito *et al.* (2013), socially-contextualised interpretations of digital learning
46 often centre on “an equity agenda of deploying new media to reach and enable youth” (p. 8).
47 Accordingly, CALL is not solely an approach for generating positive linguistic outcomes;
48 rather, an opportunity to exploit networked media to build learning communities and social
49 connections in a socially-inclusive manner. Placing this philosophy within an epistemological
50 register, community-based, or *connected* CALL emphasises the negative consequences of
51 reifying and de-contextualising knowledge whilst also endeavouring to illuminate the contexts
52 that steer the production of meaning (Kincheloe, 1997). From a critical stance, community-
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based CALL explicitly recognises the influence of dominant systems and hierarchies on social agents. In doing so, the paradigm seeks to promote empowerment and agency while simultaneously addressing the unequal prioritisation of interest and opportunity amongst users.

Yet, following CALL's behaviouristic and communicative phases, Chapelle (2003) notes that digital language education historically manifests via the technology-as-neutral fallacy, positioning CALL as a tool standing ready to "dispense" knowledge irrespective of broader social context; thus, "language, learning, and the learner are all seen as unchanged by the introduction of new technologies" (Waschauer, 1998, p. 758). Nevertheless, such claims remain problematic given social actors are never fully autonomous; "our agency is always *co-shaped*ⁱ not only by the tools we use but also by the socio-material environment in which we use the tools" (Anwaruddin, 2017, p. 27). Deterministic interpretations of technology have also significantly impacted CALL practice, whereby technology is interpreted "as an independent factor, with its own properties, its own course of development, and its own consequences" (Murphie and Potts, 2003, p. 12). In essence, CALL autonomously produces learning outcomes; it is something that "tends to function independently of the system it serves. It becomes autonomous" (Postman, 1993, p. 142). In this regard, deterministic CALL practice focuses on understanding the individual "effect of the computer" on language acquisition. Nevertheless, this position is flawed given "the computer's effect cannot be researched independently of the particular way the technology is put to use" (Warschauer, 1998, p. 758).

Given the Internet represents *the* leading transmitter of enculturated knowledge (Darvin, 2017)—and, in consequence, social and epistemic hierarchies manifesting between cultures—it is clear that integrative CALL requires a more socially responsive lens. Indeed, the implicit "assumptions, values, and norms" (Flanagin *et al.*, 2000, p. 410) driving online practice hold the potential to redefine "notions of private and public space, while privileging and marginalising ideas, cultures, and people" (Darvin, 2017, p. 17). With the fallacious instrumental and deterministic interpretations in view, community-based CALL understands CMC and online education alike as a series of continuing dialogues between contexts, cultures, and learning institutions. In doing so, it seeks to highlight the implicit phenomena driving learning within diverse social fields (Bourdieu, 1986). This multi-perspectival model serves as a referent for pedagogic reform, questioning dominant interpretations of digital learning by contesting the ideological frames and structures influencing such accounts. In this regard, community-based CALL seeks to highlight unequal social dynamics, subjugated knowledge,

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3 and alternative epistemologies via “the identification of contact points where these macro and
4 micro manifestations of power connect” (Kincheloe, 1997, p. 58).

7 **Facilitating Equitable CALL**

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10 Following Norton (2013), this inquiry employs the term *identity* to reference “how a
11 person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed
12 across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 45).
13 Following the multitude of circumstances driving digital relationships and contexts, online
14 identities are diverse, contingent on change, and, consistent with the anti-structuralist
15 interpretation of subjectivity, a site of conflict. Taking this interpretation into account, social
16 agents frame and mediate identities through Internet-driven SLA/FLA, re-interpreting
17 connections vis-à-vis broader sociolinguistic context, often struggling to launch or *legitimise*
18 their position within the scope of the target culture and language.
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21 White (2007) posits that “identity is... constructed, negotiated, and maintained to a
22 significant extent through language and discourse” (p. 101). This process is neither invariant
23 nor homogenous; instead, it implies “social exchange on a particular set of terms. By extension,
24 it is a relation that is constantly being renegotiated as symbolic and material resources in society
25 change their value” (Norton, 2013, p. 47). The navigation, indeed *negotiation*, of digital
26 learning spaces thereby manifests at the base-level of social interactions, where non-native
27 language users “struggle for access to social networks that will give them the opportunities to
28 practice” (Norton, 2013, pp. 149–150). It follows that, if CALL practice is to prove equitable,
29 it must embrace strategies that recognise the innate pluralism of SLA/FLA participants, and
30 the connection between sociolinguistic context and how language learners perceive the self and
31 *interact* with others through non-native cultures and languages. Against this background, the
32 de-contextualised instrumentalisation of CALL as a mere “tool” or “toy” (Rice and Deschaine,
33 2020, p. 119) becomes ever-more problematic.
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37 Calling on Lave and Wenger’s (1991) *community of practice*, wherein “groups of
38 people who share a concern or a passion for something they do ... learn how to do it better as
39 they interact regularly” (Wenger, 2009, p. 1), community-based CALL is helpful in
40 conceptualising the interactions between shared sociolinguistic practice and digital identity,
41 and how this understanding can uphold egalitarian language learning networks. Central to
42 connected practice is “access by newcomers to the community of practice and all that
43 membership entails” (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 100). In this sense, the positionality of users
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4 within online learning communities requires increased scrutiny, with stakeholders and
5 community members recognised not as unattached individuals but “members of social and
6 historical collectivities” (Norton, 2013, p. 122).
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9 To some extent, communities of practice parallel Siemens’ (2005) theory of
10 *connectivism*, in which language acquisition and cultural exposure manifest per various *nodes*,
11 or sources of information, within knowledge-rich environments. In the connected space,
12 learning and knowledge rest in the diversity of opinions, whereby connections are nurtured and
13 conserved to facilitate equitable participation (Siemens, 2005). A productive language learning
14 community thereby situates diverse users as active participants, incorporating individual online
15 identities within shared context through engagement in—and egalitarian contributions to—
16 collaborative practices (Wenger *et al.*, 2002). As noted by Jeon *et al.* (2011), this may, in turn,
17 enhance self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation and among newcomers when navigating CALL
18 environments. More importantly, interactions within online learning collectives hold the
19 potential to lessen COVID-19-induced “stress, panic disorder, depression, loneliness and
20 uncertainty” (Maican and Cocoradă, 2021, p. 2) as the denial of face-to-face contact lingers.
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30 To account for diverse learner identities, CALL practitioners are encouraged to
31 structure communal spaces so that academic productivity secures itself to interest-driven
32 content. In the context of SLA/FLA, shared communities may evolve informally due to a
33 shared curiosity for language or be consciously managed by the practitioner to achieve specific
34 pedagogical goals (Jeon *et al.*, 2011). Regardless, through sharing information and real-world
35 experience, learners are afforded the opportunity to acquire language not only from the teacher
36 but from one another (Lave and Wenger, 1991). In this regard, interactions between digital
37 communities and language learning link advances in target language comprehension with “the
38 support of friends, caring adults, and/or expert communities” (Kumpulainen and Sefton-Green,
39 2014, p. 10). The connected nature of integrative CALL, meanwhile, serves to augment shared
40 knowledge and, when properly embraced, diminish the social, linguistic, and semiotic
41 hierarchies found in traditional educational settings (Ito *et al.*, 2013, p. 10).
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51 For instance, a study by Lam (2006) describes how immigrant East Asian students
52 utilised social network platforms to forge identities as multicultural, multilingual, and
53 *multicompetent* learners. These students revealed not only English language acquisition
54 opportunities seemingly denied to them within their non-connected educational contexts, but
55 renounced their former, stereotyped identities as ineffectual English language users, creating
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4 “new learning experiences, competencies, and representations of linguistic and cultural
5 identities in the use of language and literacy” (Lam, 2006, p. 171). Rejecting the deterministic
6 image of technology as a panacea of socio-educational friction, however, Lam (2006) stresses
7 that communication through online networks “do[es] not necessarily provide the analytical
8 tools that may empower youths to critique and change existing social structures in positive
9 directions” (p. 186). For instance, how “relationships were constructed and represented through
10 the use of language, symbolic media, and forms of communication” (Lam, 2006, p. 189). Given
11 English’s position as *the* lingua franca of digital communication (Warschauer, 2003), the
12 technical configuration of the Internet strengthens a sociolinguistic order, enhancing the
13 symbolic “value” (i.e., linguistic capital) of English compared to alternative languages and
14 cultures, affirming Jordan’s (2001) claim that:

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“There are conditions that structure participation in cyberculture because only certain languages and certain cultural norms of communication are embedded in cyberspace’s technology. Here language is limited, cultural resources specific, and the politics of cyberculture is moulded in cyberspace’s technological history.” (Jordan, 2001, p. 2)

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Likewise, in examining the function and impact of multimodal CMC on learner identity, Lewis and Fabos (2005) describe learners engaging in non-formal networks to enhance their social and linguistic capitals within multilingual settings. In this context, learners frequently assumed context-dependent online identities, which, in turn, permitted them to engage in social and literacy practices that were, consistent with Lam (2006), absent during formal education. Calling into question the deterministic reading of technology-mediated learning outcomes as “automatically generated” (Ortega and Zyzik, 2008, p. 334), however, Jeon *et al.* (2011) note the critical importance of understanding the “social-psychological motivations [that] have a positive influence on knowledge sharing” (p. 263). While such findings support the possibility that digital language learning *may* complement the social contexts of diverse groups, that the needs of these participants went unrecognised or, perhaps, taken-for-granted within non-community-orientated learning environments reveals a vital failure in quality assurance. Following Bourdieu (1997), these assumptions are erroneous since “the experience of a world that is ‘taken for granted’ presupposes agreement between the dispositions of the agents and the expectations or demands immanent in the world into which they are inserted” (p. 147).

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To avoid these tacit expectations, community-orientated practitioners must plan for diverse student interactions within the context of unfamiliar technological and, indeed, sociocultural learning systems. Supporting the anti-instrumental position, Rice and Deschaine (2020) note that “learning in online environments is not a simple, apolitical endeavor” (p. 114); hence, teachers must be cognizant of the social and affective elements driving online discourse (and, as a consequence, learner relationships) within their respective CALL networks. In keeping with the emergent identities described by Lewis and Fabos (2005) and Lam (2006), for example, the strengthening of linguistic capital through the creation of “competent” English-speaking cultural identities manifests as an epistemic hierarchy, formed on the relative value and cataloguing of linguistic and, by association, encultured knowledge. Contrary to the instrumental reading of CALL neutrality, this “systematic filtering” (Darvin, 2017, p. 22) ensures that it is “impossible to talk about politically, culturally, and socially neutral knowledge” (Isik, 2008, p. 125) within the context of English-language CMC.

Indeed, Laurillard and Kennedy (2017) posit that non-native language users often feel pressured to abandon their established cultural identities in order to accommodate unfamiliar sociocultural and pedagogical contexts. Conversely, community-based CALL networks, such as those formed via social networking services, message boards, and massive open online courses, reveal opportunities for situating language acquisition within familiar cultural paradigms that may contribute to online collaboration (Wenger *et al.*, 2003; Siemens, 2005). Jeon *et al.* (2011), for example, note that the “need for affiliation” may be addressed by providing spaces “in which individuals share feelings, emotions and mental models” (p. 263). This generates not only hybridised native-SLA/FLA practice; it offers a secure and inclusive space in which to develop linguistic proficiencies, skirting the potentially negative emotional impact of “improper” linguistic practice. As noted by Lam (2006), this issue is of particular concern to the self-efficacy and identity of foreign language learners newly introduced to group settings, as demonstrated in this learner dialogue:

“I didn’t dare to speak English before because my English was poor, like in pronunciation and grammar. I was afraid to say something wrong, and then people would laugh at me, and I would feel embarrassed.” (Lam, 2006, p. 181)

Nevertheless, while remote CALL communities retain the potential to enhance positive identity outcomes, Ortega and Zyzik (2008) have called for the tempering of “euphoric views”

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4 (p. 333) towards digital interaction—particularly those portraying “a utopian middle landscape,
5 where native speakers and non-native speakers can have access to one another as linguistic
6 entities on a screen, unfettered by historical, geographical, national or institutional identities”
7 (Kramersch and Thorne, 2002, p. 85). Helm (2017), for instance, actively rejects the
8 deterministic belief that cross-cultural exchange and understanding “automatically result[s]
9 from the contact and interaction with distant ‘others’” (p. 222), observing how foreign language
10 learners are habitually confronted by “difficulties, tensions, and failure[s]” (Helm, 2017, p. 223)
11 when attempting cross-cultural CALL.
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18 For instance, an investigation by Belz (2002) into multicultural community-based CMC
19 using telecollaborative activities reported that negative, culturally normalised understandings
20 of “social context and institutional setting, situated activity, and individual agency” (p. 60)
21 generated communicative barriers and diminished intercultural awareness. In Belz’s (2002)
22 findings, the pre-established identities of both participant groups provoked a “clash of cultural
23 faultlines” or, in simple terms, “things about the other they don’t understand” (Belz, 2002, p.
24 76), that elicited a breakdown of learner interaction and the generation of cultural stereotypes
25 amongst both groups.
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32 A growing number of researchers have thus contested the broad, deterministic
33 representation of integrative CALL as automatically enhancing user equity and interaction.
34 Jeon-Ellis *et al.* (2005) suggest that identity considerations, such as “personal relationships,
35 preferences, and motivations” (p. 121), hold significant influence over the degree and quality
36 of student interactions during digital language learning. Moreover, the authors note that learner
37 communication may occur to the immediate exclusion of other students, warning that
38 communal and individual dynamics must be “very carefully handled if [CMC] is intended to
39 enhance goal-oriented interaction in the target language and language learning” (Jeon-Ellis *et*
40 *al.*, 2005, p. 142).
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48 Against this background, tacit inequities in term of social privilege remains an all-too-
49 common risk for online language learning communities. An inquiry by Reeder *et al.* (2005),
50 for example, noted that CALL interactions often sustain established social hierarchies within
51 extracurricular multicultural communities. Specifically, the authors described First Nation
52 Canadian learners as being three times less likely to participate in group CMC activities when
53 compared to their international or European-descended Canadian peers. Revealingly, the
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3 authors noted that aboriginal Canadian learners struggled to initiate student-practitioner
4 dialogue throughout the length of the study.
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8 Indeed, Norton (2001) notes how “a disjuncture between the learner’s imagined
9 community and the teacher’s curriculum goals,” in which SLA/FLA practitioners “engage the
10 identities of learners in diverse and sometimes unsettling ways” (p. 170), often results in non-
11 participation during language learning tasks. For instance, Reeder *et al.* (2005) describe how
12 culturally-normalised representations of learner-practitioner relationships, the self, and
13 dialogue within public spaces negatively impacted interaction amongst Native Canadian
14 participants. The authors note that “the interaction of communicative style with status and
15 power relations in our course resulted in our aboriginal participants’ unwillingness to confer
16 specifically with authorities online because of the discussion forums’ public nature” (p. 99).
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24 With this in mind, the pedagogical context described by Reeder *et al.* (2005) failed to
25 rationalise “participant structures, or contexts for verbal participation” (p. 99) amongst
26 minority cultures, implicitly enhancing established sociocultural hierarchies. “Euphoric”
27 (Ortega and Zyzik, 2008, p. 333) visions of CALL engendering cultural understanding thereby
28 risk obscuring those sociocultural pressures that impact user identity and, thus, how diverse
29 social actors interact within language learning communities. To be more specific, the context
30 depicted here emphasises the negative potential for the cultural norms of practitioners to dictate
31 integrative CALL tasks while also serving to reinforce the coordinates of social dominance.
32 From this perspective, the very structure of online language learning is secured to the
33 sociocultural and epistemological standards of the target culture—intimating that digital
34 interventions, no matter how well-intentioned, may inadvertently impede the preparedness of
35 a learner to interact with a CALL network. Thus, “digital spaces [are] social places that do not
36 evade the inequalities of the ‘physical’ world” (Helm, 2017, p. 226).
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48 In closing, it is apparent that affective factors play a vital role in the direction and
49 effectiveness of digital language education (Espino *et al.*, 2021). For example, in the shift from
50 brick-and-mortar provision to emergency online education, the “lack of interaction with peers
51 and the teacher, as well as the feeling that the development of their language skills and
52 knowledge could be endangered” (Maican and Cocoradă, 2021, p. 14) contribute significantly
53 to adverse emotional outcomes. Further, far from a panacea for emergency language instruction,
54 practitioners must be mindful that CALL provision is no simple task. The studies presented
55 here illustrate that despite teachers’ best intentions, non-contextual (i.e. instrumental and
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deterministic) practices often reinforce sociolinguistic hierarchies. In providing a peer-supported, interest-powered, production-centred learning environment that contributes to a shared academic purpose, however, community-based CALL can address the fracture between in-and-ex-situ learning and, more importantly, create additional connections between learners by drawing from the experiences of diverse communities (Ito *et al.*, 2013, p. 4). In positioning learning not as an internal, individualistic process, but an openly-networked, collaborative endeavour, community-based CALL presents a model of instruction that not only acknowledges learner equity, identity, and interaction but an increasingly digital society that the field of language education has, until now, been slow to recognise.

Conclusions

Given the present global context, CALL represents a persuasive medium for sudden-onset SLA/FLA and, more broadly, cross-cultural interactions; nonetheless, CALL communities must identify and accommodate the sociocultural frameworks by which diverse groups navigate online language learning. As demonstrated by Lewis and Fabos (2005) and Lam (2006), the impact of ex-situ CALL interaction on learner identity and self-efficacy is often positive, allowing social agents to transcend the sociolinguistic and pedagogical assumptions that may undermine language acquisition within “traditional” educational contexts. In view of this, the digital exploration of language and culture through community-based ecologies encourages the pluralistic growth of the user.

As evidenced by Norton (2013), an appreciable number of studies detailing the impact of digital interventions on identity and language acquisition have been favourable. For example, Lam (2006) notes that “networked electronic communications have given rise to new social spaces, linguistic and semiotic practices, and ways of fashioning the self” (p. 171). Nevertheless, the deterministic representation of CALL as a general equaliser of hierarchical participation structures is often erroneous. From an ethical and academic stance, language learning practitioners must reject the conceptualisation of these benefits as “automatically generated” (Ortega and Zyzik, 2008, p. 334) if they are to facilitate socially equitable online curricula and content.

The findings of Jeon-Ellis *et al.* (2005) and Reeder *et al.* (2005), in particular, emphasise that the across-the-board benefits of CALL are far from guaranteed. Socially-guided perceptions of identity, interactivity, and participation have been shown to exert socially significant—on occasion, *negative*—impacts on CALL practices and the processes by which

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3 learners navigate culturally unfamiliar learning contexts. As a consequence, digital SLA/FLA
4 practice should pivot toward an open design that, where possible, accommodates the cultural
5 and epistemological contexts of its learners. This attentive form of sudden-onset CALL may
6 result in practice appreciative of “issues of participation, reticence, cultural norms, and agency”
7 (Ortega and Zyzik, 2008, p. 334) and thus, the culturally-normalised procedures by which
8 second and foreign language learners forge heterogeneous identities within digital learning
9 spaces.
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CALL in a Social Context: Reflecting on Digital Equity, Identity, and Interaction in the Post-COVID Age

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ⁱ Emphasis present in original text.

