

## ***SPECIAL ISSUE COMMENTARY***

### **HEGEMONIES IN CALL**

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An assumption that the technologies, pedagogies, and sociocultural norms associated with CALL are universal has implicitly permeated much of the discipline's research over the past two decades. The current special issue draws together critical perspectives that problematize the workings of hegemonies, examining their complex effects on language students, teachers, and classrooms in a variety of linguistic and cultural settings, and considering what it means to resist them. This thought-provoking and provocative collection of articles from a multicultural, multilingual group of contributors contrasts voices from the Anglosphere with voices from less well-served territories, ensuring a fruitful dialogue between them.

*Hegemony* refers to a situation where one culture or one form of praxis predominates and prevents the development or continued viability of alternative cultures and forms of praxis. In the field of CALL, hegemonies take varied and subtle shapes and forms. *Technological hegemonies* derive from the hegemonic implications of commonly used hardware, software and, of course, the Internet and the Web. *Pedagogical hegemonies* relate to the implications of social constructivism and associated interactive, collaborative, student-centred pedagogies, as well as curriculum and course design, while wider *educational hegemonies* derive from educational and institutional policies, expectations and norms. Going beyond strictly educational concerns, *social hegemonies* relate to the norms and practices of interaction and, specifically, online interaction. More broadly still, *cultural and intercultural hegemonies* might be seen to stem from Western cultural norms and approaches to cross-cultural contact, while *sociopolitical hegemonies* are tied to the hegemonic implications of larger social and political structures, as well as the implications of resistance to these and other hegemonies. In practice, as our authors reveal, hegemonic structures at one level are inseparable from hegemonic structures at other levels, while what is hegemonic in one context may become counterhegemonic in another. In short, this is a topic which requires reflective, carefully nuanced approaches, of the kind that the authors in this collection bring to the current discussion.

In their paper, "[Power within blended language learning programs in Japan](#)," Don Hinkelman and Paul Gruba examine the way that a shift towards a blended learning approach to CALL is about much more than technological change; it can be, they argue, an "interventionist strategy of iterative change in integrating face-to-face techniques with computer-based techniques" (p. 61). Reporting on longitudinal studies of EFL teaching at two Japanese universities, they show how, with an appropriately collaborative management culture, power can be redistributed as part of the move towards blended learning. Such a move can open up the potential for classrooms to transform from single-purpose CALL environments to spaces where a broader range of pedagogical approaches is possible; for locally produced multimedia materials to supplement or replace mass market materials; and for software to be configured to local needs. Such changes, they note, depend not only on shifting institutional hegemonies, but on wider shifts in "the political and economic ecosystems of language learning technology" (p. 61).

Teacher resistance to pedagogical and educational hegemonies is the focus of Euline Cutrim Schmid and Shona Whyte's paper, "[Interactive whiteboards in state school settings: Teacher responses to socio-constructivist hegemonies](#)." Reporting on a study of interactive whiteboard (IWB) use by non-native EFL teachers in French and German state schools, they argue that it is ineffective to try to hegemonically impose particular pedagogical approaches. Despite teachers' socio-constructivist training, and despite the imposition of IWBs intended to support a socio-constructivist paradigm, the reality is that IWBs lend themselves to a wide range of educational practices and are not necessarily transformative in and of

themselves. The study reveals that teachers used IWBs to support a variety of paradigms, from traditional grammar-translation and behaviourism to communicative and constructivist approaches. Teachers, then, find ways to resist educational and pedagogical hegemonies which do not sit easily with their own personal experiences, beliefs and contexts. In order to encourage teachers to engage more deeply with socio-constructivist CALL which, the authors observe, is currently our most effective model for language teaching with technology, there is a need for more teacher training and development, while social, cultural, and political settings must also be taken into account.

In a paper entitled “[Caught in the Web: Overcoming and reproducing hegemony in Azerbaijan](#),” Cara Preuss and Carolyn Morway explore the tension between the hegemonic and counterhegemonic potential of employing contemporary Western pedagogical approaches to teaching English in non-Western contexts. On the one hand, this practice may serve to impose Western pedagogical hegemonies, but on the other hand it may simultaneously disrupt “comfortable” local teaching practices and the local hegemonies they support. Reporting on a study of U.S. English teachers in Azerbaijan, the authors show how the teachers’ limited conception of CALL (the notion that it required fixed desktop technology in a lab) and misperception of students’ level of technology access (the notion that net access was limited) prevented them from exploring the pedagogical potential of the mobile technologies the students carried with them every day, and constrained their ability to act as critical educators whose work could lead to social change. After all, suggest the authors, CALL can help develop students’ technological skills, their ability to critically consume information, and their communicative options, all of which are tools they can use in the future to help them counter both local and global hegemonic practices.

Francesca Helm, Sarah Guth, and Mohammed Farrah reflect on how telecollaboration projects can address cultural and intercultural hegemonies, in a paper entitled “[Promoting dialogue or hegemonic practice? Power issues in telecollaboration](#).” They report on two cohorts of learners, from an Italian and a Palestinian university respectively, who interacted through the Soliya Connect Program; this is a program that fosters interaction between the Arab and Muslim world on the one hand, and the Western world on the other. Rather than being positioned as language learners, participants were positioned as representatives of their respective parts of the world, a polarization which increased the probability of intercultural conflict. However, the authors argue this is not necessarily a problem, with a dialogic approach to points of disagreement leading to opportunities for learning and a growth in intercultural awareness. In this way, telecollaboration projects can challenge technological, educational and especially cultural hegemonies by openly inviting learners to investigate and learn about differences and power dynamics in a safe, expertly facilitated environment. As the students reported, it can be a way of people coming “to know and understand each other as ‘human beings’ and ‘real people’” (p. 118).

Before we leave the reader to meet our contributors, we would like to briefly reflect on our experience of putting together a special issue on this topic, specifically in relation to what we have called *cultural and intercultural hegemonies*. From its inception, the project harboured a potential contradiction: would our call for papers, launched in English on mainly English-medium networks, reach those scholars who might (a) be able to write from personal experience about the dominance of English in CALL, or (b) be willing to critique the “Anglospheric” academic culture in which they work? We soon found that many of those submitting were, if not from English-speaking countries, certainly from English-influenced cultures. Worse, as the editorial operations unfolded, several of those from other academic traditions fell foul of the genre conventions and the refereeing process. One startling incident involved a co-contributor publishing an immature version of one of the papers in an online journal without informing her co-authors, prompting the latter to wonder whether to blame a culturally determined misunderstanding of Western authoring ethics rather than an intent to plagiarize.

Very similar inequalities to those mentioned in Lillis, Magyar and Robinson-Pant (2010) came to light in the process of our guest-editing of the special issue. They included (a) better performance by submitters with prior experience of publishing in “high status journals,” usually meaning U.S., Australian or

European-based ones; (b) poorer performance by submitters with less easy “access to the necessary material resources for securing such publication...such as limited access to current journals” (Lillis et al., 2010, p. 782); and (c) uneven performance by submitters from a “[d]iversity of linguistic-rhetorical practices” (ibid.). In an issue dedicated to critiquing sociocultural hegemonies, these inequalities cannot be glossed over. So to the broad question that our contributors addressed in their articles (i.e., “what kind of hegemonies are at work in CALL?”) we argue that two new questions should be added: “what kind of hegemonies condition the publication and dissemination of CALL research, and how can they be resisted?” Both this journal and *Compare*, the journal in which Lillis et al. (2010) were published, have taken deliberate steps in one possible direction<sup>1</sup> by promoting training measures through [publishing research guidelines](#) or by setting up programmes of workshops and mentoring for intending submitters. Yet this is only one option, about which Lillis et al. comment:

[e]ven if the programme is seen to have succeeded on its own terms (that is, that more non-Anglophone writers are being published in *Compare*), there is the larger question about how far enabling writers from the ‘periphery’ greater voice and access to centre-based journals is strengthening the position of dominance of Anglophone centre and English language journals over all others (p. 796).

As we explore the diverse and sometimes unexpected contexts and findings assembled in this issue, we should not lose track of that question.

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## NOTE

1. Another direction is to learn from the educational traditions of other world cultures. Nobody in the CALL community has attempted this. However, for a series of essays on pedagogy offline in non-Western contexts, see Akkari and Dasen (2004), *Pédagogies et pédagogues du Sud*. Paris: L’Harmattan, <http://www.editions-harmattan.fr/index.asp?navig=catalogue&obj=livre&no=18425>

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## REFERENCE

Lillis, T., Magyar, A., & Robinson-Pant, A. (2010). An international journal’s attempts to address inequalities in academic publishing: Developing a writing for publication programme, *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 40 (6), 781–800.