Instructors as MALL engineers: adapting, modifying, and creating mobile materials for listening practice

Mike Barcomb[1], Jennica Grimshaw[2], and Walcir Cardoso[3]

Abstract. For teachers to utilize Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) resources, they must consider how to balance implementation with their available resources. As it is no longer the case that programming is required to create one's own MALL resources, teachers could benefit from a framework that helps them to match their resources and pedagogical goals with user-friendly and customizable MALL materials. To this end, this paper serves as a proposal for a framework that helps teachers to match their available resources with three levels of customizable MALL materials for listening practice: adaptation, modification, and creation. The possibilities for teacher customized MALL materials at each level will be discussed.

Keywords: mobile-assisted language learning, MALL, design, teacher education.

1. Introduction

In the foreign/second language (L2) context, language practice is often limited to generic homework activities derived from textbooks intended for a wide audience and may therefore not be relevant to every learning context (Howard & Major, 2004). To mitigate this issue, the use of MALL and teacher-friendly applications afford language instructors the opportunity to generate custom-made activities that can increase target language input exposure – an important step when learning a language (e.g. Nation & Newton, 2009) – that is designed specifically for their students.

1. Concordia University, Montreal, Canada; michael.barcomb@mail.concordia.ca
2. Concordia University, Montreal, Canada; jennica.grimshaw@concordia.ca
3. Concordia University, Montreal, Canada; walcir.cardoso@concordia.ca

How to cite this article: Barcomb, M., Grimshaw, J., & Cardoso, W. (2018). Instructors as MALL engineers: adapting, modifying, and creating mobile materials for listening practice. In P. Taalas, J. Jalkanen, L. Bradley & S. Thouësny (Eds), *Future-proof CALL: language learning as exploration and encounters – short papers from EUROCALL 2018* (pp. 11-15). Research-publishing.net. https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2018.26.805

Instructors who have decided to incorporate MALL into their courses need to make pedagogical choices such as the type of application (app), the type of engagement (e.g. aural input, oral output), and between whom the interaction takes place (e.g. student to computer, student to student). With the many options available, including learning how to navigate and use MALL software, it is important that instructors understand how to organize their time and resources to fully benefit from the pool of available MALL resources.

As teachers no longer need to program to make their own materials, this paper proposes a framework that places instructor-friendly customizable MALL resources on a continuum with three distinct levels of involvement (as in Barcomb, Grimshaw, & Cardoso, 2017). It provides an overview of the duties associated with building materials at each level: adaptation, modification, and creation, with the intent of helping instructors to match their abilities, resources, and pedagogical goals to current MALL resources.

Although MALL resources can target many different skills, this paper provides specific examples of how listening practice can be targeted at each level of the framework, as customized listening practice outside the classroom is often difficult to come by. By mobilizing and customizing aural input and practice, the instructor can enhance the learning experience and increase student exposure to the target language without the restrictions of time or space.

2. Background

When it comes to using technology in the classroom, language instructors often feel limited by restrictions such as budgeting, additional planning time, restricted classroom time, and, most importantly, a lack of training (Godwin-Jones, 2015). Many instructors may also feel overwhelmed by the sheer volume of resources, not knowing where to start or how to critically choose the best programs.

In line with Godwin-Jones's (2015) call for language instructors to develop the programming skills necessary to increase their understanding of how technology can be used to teach languages, the proposed framework is designed to introduce instructors to a pool of MALL materials by taking into account their resources and prior experiences. This process aims to enable teachers to work at a level more likely to lead to successful implementation of MALL, concentrating on adapting, modifying, and creating customizable materials that can increase interaction with the target language input in the mobile setting.

The proposed framework is designed to help instructors begin or reconsider their current use of MALL in their classes to critically select and construct content, tools, and activities, but other frameworks, such as Chapelle's (2001) criteria for computer assisted language learning task appropriateness, should also be considered when designing materials using customizable programs.

3. Our proposal: the three levels

To alleviate the above issues, we propose three levels of instructor involvement in customizable MALL implementation: adaptation, modification, and creation (Table 1), with a focus on listening practice. The levels reflect the degree of instructor involvement in material creation (e.g. active versus passive roles), and the amount of time and effort required. The levels are not static and share many commonalities, depending on how the instructor engages with the materials.

Table 1. Three levels of instructor involvement

User role	**Level 1**	**Level 2**	**Level 3**
Choose from pre-made content	Yes	Yes	Yes
Modify pre-made activities		Yes	Yes
Create own content			Yes
Create own activities			Yes
Examples	Duolingo for Schools, Google Translate	Quizlet, TinyCards	Moodle, ARIS

3.1. Level 1: adaptation as means of entering MALL customization

At the first level, the focus is on *adapting* pre-made MALL materials. This is an important first step that frees instructors of modifying and creating content, and thus enables them to focus on implementing the selected technology to facilitate the development of the L2. For example, *Duolingo for Schools* allows instructors to assign pre-made interactive content, levels, and tasks to their learners, including listening and dictation tasks. Instructors therefore do not have to create any content, activities, or gamified elements on their own; instead they *adapt* pre-made materials by assigning only the relevant ones to their students.

By helping instructors become aware of the way that resources at Level 1 are amenable to adaptation, the use of non-pedagogical apps such as *Google Translate*

can be further explored to provide textual and aural input on the go. Here, the instructor could guide learners to use certain features of the app for specific purposes, such as a pronunciation model. Working at this level is best for teachers who may have limited resources or no prior experience using MALL materials, though advanced users are also likely to incorporate skills and/or apps from Level 1 in the following two levels.

3.2. Level 2: modification as a means of customizing content

As an extension of Level 1, Level 2 focuses on the actual *modification* of pre-made materials, which positions the instructor in a more active role as a designer. This is particularly helpful when generic textbook or MALL activities do not meet the specific learning needs of a group of students. In Level 2, instructors can, for example, customize student listening practice by modifying a set of Text-To-Speech (TTS) enhanced vocabulary cards by replacing the TTS voice with his or her own, adding original images, or editing the text on each card. Instructors who are comfortable with software modification (e.g. TTS vocabulary cards) can advance and use flashcard-building apps such as *Quizlet* to modify aspects of TTS-based cards. They can then make them available in pre-made matching games and multiple choice listening quizzes with gamified elements to motivate students to practice.

Despite the challenges associated with modifying customizable MALL materials (e.g. they require more time and technological expertise), teachers at Level 2 can tailor apps to address the needs of their students, based on their pedagogical and technological know-how and available time.

3.3. Level 3: creating a complete MALL experience

Finally, instructors engaging at Level 3 have full creative control over adapting, modifying, and creating MALL materials that increase interaction with the target language (Barcomb et al., 2017, p. 2). Not only do instructors have the ability to create their own materials, but they can also determine how these materials are organized and presented to learners. One approach to creation at the third level is through learning management systems, which can lead to the creation of highly effective MALL materials that incorporate modified, adapted, and created materials. For example, through the use of user-generated plugins in *Moodle*, teachers can incorporate videos, quizzes with embedded audio, and student-generated glossary entries. The latter can include video, audio, and/or images that reward points to learners upon the completion of each activity.

Another example of Level 3 creation that highlights mobility is the use of augmented reality app creators such as *ARIS* to create place-based mobile applications. By using GPS markers, *ARIS* allows instructors to mobilize the classroom by taking the learners on a language learning experience of discovery; for example, students can use their mobile devices to scan QR codes around the classroom in an interactive scavenger hunt. As students scan QR codes or reach GPS locations, video and/or audio cues can pop up on the user's screen to enable additional listening practice.

4. Conclusions

By establishing these three levels of teacher involvement, we hope to help instructors bypass some of the hindrances commonly associated with implementing educational technology and support new and experienced users of MALL in their journey towards becoming creators of their own MALL materials. In this paper, we identify resources and activities that permit instructors to adapt, modify, and/or create listening activities that are relevant and engaging to their students. By doing so, we hope that the MALL design process becomes more tangible to all instructors, regardless of ability, training, or available resources.

References

Barcomb, M., Grimshaw, J., & Cardoso, W. (2017). I can't program! Customizable mobile language-learning resources for researchers and practitioners. *Languages, 2*(3), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.3390/languages2030008

Chapelle, C. (2001). *Computer applications in second language acquisition*. Cambridge. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139524681

Godwin-Jones, R. (2015). Emerging technologies the evolving roles of language teachers: trained coders, local researchers, global citizens. *Learning and Technology, 19*(1), 10-22.

Howard, J., & Major, J. (2004). Guidelines for designing effective English language teaching materials. *The TESOLANZ Journal, 12*, 50-58.

Nation, I. S. P., & Newton, J. (2009). *Teaching ESL/EFL listening and speaking. ESL & applied linguistics professional series*. Routledge.

Published by Research-publishing.net, a not-for-profit association
Contact: info@research-publishing.net

Future-proof CALL: language learning as exploration and encounters – short papers from EUROCALL 2018
Edited by Peppi Taalas, Juha Jalkanen, Linda Bradley, and Sylvie Thouësny

Publication date: 2018/12/08

Typeset by Research-publishing.net
Cover theme by © 2018 Antti Myöhänen (antti.myohanen@gmail.com)
Cover layout by © 2018 Raphaël Savina (raphael@savina.net)
Drawings by © 2018 Linda Saukko-Rauta (linda@redanredan.fi)

ISBN13: 978-2-490057-22-1 (Ebook, PDF, colour)
ISBN13: 978-2-490057-23-8 (Ebook, EPUB, colour)
ISBN13: 978-2-490057-21-4 (Paperback - Print on demand, black and white)
Print on demand technology is a high-quality, innovative and ecological printing method; with which the book is never 'out of stock' or 'out of print'.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.
A cataloguing record for this book is available from the British Library.

Legal deposit, UK: British Library.
Legal deposit, France: Bibliothèque Nationale de France - Dépôt légal: Décembre 2018.