FROM THE SPECIAL ISSUE EDITORS

In the last few years, technology has consolidated its place as an important resource in the planning, implementation and evaluation of language programs. Use of technology for both content delivery and learning management is now widespread. In terms of content delivery, technology can do as well, if not better than, face-to-face instruction in the areas of reading, listening, grammar, and vocabulary development. However, one area that remains both problematic and contentious is that of oral language development.

In this special issue of *Language Learning and Technology,* six studies are presented that look at various aspects of technology and oral language development. In the first study, Payne and Ross investigate the effect of working memory on language output. Twenty-four students of Spanish as a foreign language took part in the study. Oral proficiency was measured through an elicited 5-minute speech sample from each subject. Working memory was measured through a nonword repetition task and a reading span test. Data for analysis came from 150 topic-driven chatroom transcripts. Linguistic phenomena investigated include repetition, relexicalization, and the average number of words, utterances, and turns per chat session. According to the researchers, results suggest that chatrooms may provide a unique form of support for L2 oral proficiency development.

The second study in the issue, by Barr, Leakey, and Ranchoux, reports on a project with French undergraduate students. Students were involved in a program delivered through a blend of collaborative and individual learning through a combination of CALL programs, online instruction, and traditional face-to-face conversation classes. Through pre- and posttests and questionnaires, the researchers compared technology augmented instruction with traditional conversation classes. Results indicated that while both the treatment and control groups made progress, the non-technology group made the greater gains. The researchers concluded that CALL based teaching needs to go beyond rehearsal activities to achieve message-oriented communication.

In the third paper of the issue, Jepson compares patterns of repair moves in non-native speaker text chat and voice chat rooms on the Internet. Repair moves made in five text chat and five voice chat sessions were documented and analyzed using chi-square. In keeping with previous research, Jepson found the number of repair moves in the voice chat rooms was significantly higher than in the text chat rooms. Qualitative analysis indicated that repair moves in the voice chat rooms was often pronunciation driven. The study suggests that although text chat is more widely available, and more frequently studied, voice chat provides a potentially rich environment for pronunciation work.

Handley and Hamel set out to establish a methodology for benchmarking speech synthesis for computer-assisted language learning. The paper reports on a case study aimed at identifying the criteria for determining the adequacy of output from speech synthesis systems in relation to three potential roles: as a reading machine, as a pronunciation model, and as a conversational partner. The study involved 12 native speaking teachers of French as a second/foreign language who evaluated reading, pronunciation, and conversational corpora for appropriateness, acceptability, and comprehensibility. Although very much a preliminary study, the research suggests several promising directions for future work.

Set within a Vygotskian framework, Jeon-Ellis, Debski, and Wigglesworth investigate the oral interaction that takes place in the course of a project-oriented CALL course. Eight monolingual speakers of English enrolled in a first-year university course of French worked in small groups to complete a computer mediated project. Groups were videorecorded as they worked at the computer, and their cursor and keyboard operations were also recorded. Videorecordings were supplemented with interviews. Interactions and interviews were transcribed and analyzed qualitatively. The researchers found that the relationships that developed between the students had a major impact on generating learning opportunities for the students.

The final paper in the issue, by Volle, investigates the acquisition of speaking skills in an online distance education course by 19 first semester Spanish learners. Data were collected through audio e-mail messages and Internet-mediated conversations with the instructor. Three types of analysis were performed: articulation, accuracy, and proficiency. Only proficiency yielded a significant result.

The six studies in this special issue foreground key aspects of technology and oral language development. Research in this area is in its infancy, as is clear from the caution with which the researchers present and interpret their results. Despite this, all of the studies are of interest, both substantively and methodologically.

As guest editor, I would like to thank all those reviewers who evaluated these and other papers submitted for the special issue. Heartfelt thanks are also due to Pamela DaGrossa and Dorothy Chun. I would also like to acknowledge the secretarial and administrative support of Crystal Chan of the English Centre at the University of Hong Kong. Without their help the special issue would not have seen the light of day.

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Special Issue Editor