

## REVIEW OF *COMPUTER-ASSISTED FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING: TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES*

### **Computer-Assisted Foreign Language Teaching and Learning: Technological Advances**

Bin Zou, Minjie Xing, Yuping Wang, Mingyu Sun, and Catherine H. Xiang (Eds.)

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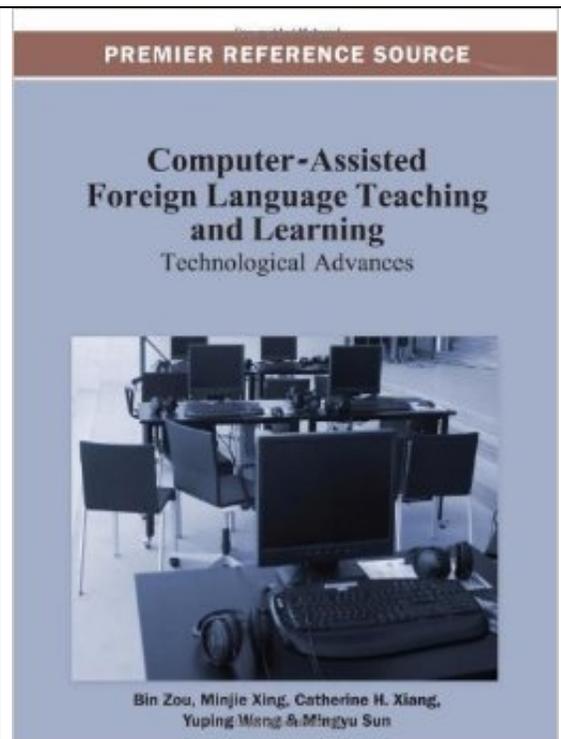
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### **Review by Robert Blake, University of California, Davis**

This book is a compendium of sixteen articles about CALL divided into three sections written in English, with a particular focus on Chinese and ESL instruction, especially business English for pre-professional students in China and first-year Chinese elsewhere in the US and UK. From a theoretical standpoint, each article stands alone; the editors do not provide any overarching framework or introduction that informs the reader other than the references made separately by each contributor.

There are four articles in the first section titled *Collaborative Learning in CALL*. In Chapter 1, Xing, Zou and Wang described a wiki project that asked English students learning Business Chinese in the UK to collaborate with Chinese students learning Business English in China with similar goals to those outlined by the MIT *Cultura Project* (Furstenberg, Levet, English, & Mailet, 2001), although the authors made no reference of this well-know initiative. Improving students' intercultural competence was the main goal and that appeared to happen as a result of the scheduled wiki activities. In Chapter 2, Wang and Chen outlined the curriculum for a totally online Chinese language instruction available to students in Australia. The development of an assessment plan for student interaction, collaboration, and reflection constituted the focus of this article by means of both synchronous and asynchronous tools such as discussion forums, social networking, videoconferencing, Wimba Boards, wikis, blogs, online essays, and online quizzes. In Chapter 3, Orsini-Jones, Brick, and Pibworth examined both the affordances and pitfalls of using social networks to create a language-learning environment, in this case, for pre-service English teachers. The results were anecdotal but point to the overall benefits and promises of this learning environment. In Chapter 4, Zhao used a social cognitive approach to design a technologically enhanced academic literacy environment for tertiary (i.e. pre-professional) Chinese students in a business English class in China. Student essays from both a computer-supported group and a regular *in situ* project-based group were

subsequently judged for the level of argumentation, organization, and linguistic sophistication. The collaborative approach appeared to improve students' knowledge of English for Special Purposes and their academic literacy as well.

The second section—*CALL, Teachers, and Learners*—begins with Chapter 5, a study by White on learner autonomy. He observed textchat data from graduate linguistics students and cited their use of ellipsis and clipped or reduced forms as proof that they spontaneously formed a community of practice with a degree of social autonomy. In Chapter 6, Terantino surveyed both faculty and students' opinions about using Facebook for language instruction. Most participants felt that Facebook was more appropriate for personal use and expressed reservations about using it for foreign language courses. Nevertheless, the benefits of this medium were obvious to all, but more teacher training about how to use this social networking tool for academic purposes would be required if attitudes were going to change. In Chapter 7, Guo and Guo found that students using the Wimba Voice Boards to practice their Chinese had high levels of engagement and participatory rates, a fact the authors used to support their implementation of a blended learning environment. In Chapter 8, Wu challenged the notion that today's students are digitally more savvy than before. Using survey data from over 1,000 foreign language students from a US university, this researcher found that 70% of them had a smart-phone or similar product with Internet access, but ironically they received little or no educational content through these mobile devices. Students asked for more content in the form of videos. Jordan and Coyle in Chapter 9 designed a Moodle automated testing curriculum to stimulate students of first-year English in China to take on more personal responsibility or agency (i.e. learning autonomy) for their linguistic progress. The results were mixed with respect to fostering increased autonomous study skills.

Chapter 10 begins the third section on *CALL Course Design* with a one-semester pilot study of online Chinese developed by Sun, Chen, and Olson at a US university. The authors provide an insightful discussion of the different synchronous and asynchronous components needed to be developed and included in this online pilot with the idea that it could then be expanded to include the entire first year in a fully online format. Performance data from this experimental class were not statistically different from those students enrolled in the regular *in situ* formats, which the authors used as justification for continuing forward with the fully online Chinese curriculum. In Chapter 11, Turel and McKenna offered a conceptualization for all of the production and curricular aspects that should go into designing online language materials: simplicity, clarity, brevity, consistency, interactivity, flexibility, motivation, and visual appeal, to name only a few. In Chapter 12, an interesting psycholinguistic departure from the rest of this collection, Mancilla examined the problems L2 students encounter while note taking with respect to cognitive overloads. Typically, foreign students in US universities suffer from the *split-attention effect*: they cannot both listen to the lecture and take notes at the same time. She suggested that the *Echo Smartpen* or similar such tools could possibly help alleviate the split-attention effect by associating the student's abbreviated writing entries with the real-time audio recordings of the professor's lecture. Although the author provides no new empirical data, she does outline future avenues of inquiry concerning Smartpens. Watson and Miller in Chapter 13 explored the use of the computer with students of commercial English to promote better listening comprehension training. The training in identifying syllable constituents helped nearly all the participants to improve, but the process sometimes took over 30 training sessions to accomplish. It was not clear from the study if the participants received a delayed posttest; in other words, it is not known whether the treatment make a permanent improvement in the subjects' comprehension abilities. In Chapter 14, Maele, Baten, Beaven, and Rajagopal described *WebCEF* ([www.webcef.eu](http://www.webcef.eu)), a European supported collaborative project to provide a dynamic assessment of oral proficiency at a distance with goals not unlike ACTFL's OPI interviews. The WebCEF project adapts the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) to various business scenarios that prompt students to react via a synchronous CMC videoconferencing tool or Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Students rate themselves with respect to their oral responses according to the categories of linguistic

range, accuracy, fluency, interaction, and coherence. Students themselves were involved in setting goals and then determining how to reach them. The tool has been used to coach Belgium business students in preparation for online job interviews in English, but no quantitative data was offered in this present study. In Chapter 15, Frane and Morton reported on the only online experiment in French in this collection with students from the University of Manchester. In this case, the language materials were offered asynchronously through a Blackboard e-learning platform. Survey data were collected for students who worked freely or with monitored input, with the result that monitored instruction produced better progress. In the final chapter in this section, Tsurutani described the CAPTA program, which provides phonetic measurements for duration and pitch tracking for any recorded utterance. The author suggested how the CAPTA program could be used in conjunction with human raters to make students' L2 pronunciation more native like.

Taken as a whole, this collection presents a series of mostly practically oriented reports on various CALL projects and, in particular, provides the reader with a better picture of CALL implementations in Chinese language and ESL instruction from around the world. But, again, as a collection of separate descriptive studies, broad themes in second language acquisition that might lend cohesiveness to the volume are lacking, and the distribution of the articles into particular sections seemed arbitrary at times. Still, it is a welcomed addition that adds richness to the CALL field.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert J. Blake is professor of Spanish linguistics at UC Davis. He was director of the UC Language Consortium (<http://ucclt.ucdavis.edu>) from 2000 to 2012. He has published widely in Spanish linguistics (Old Spanish, Spanish syntax, and applied linguistics) and CALL. In 2013, Georgetown University Press published the second edition of his book *Brave New Digital Classroom* with an expanded online component. He developed online courses for both first- and second-year Spanish. He is a member of the North American Academic of the Spanish Language. From 2013 to 2015, he served as vice-president, president, and past president of the Computer Assisted Instruction Consortium (CALICO.org).

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