

## REVIEW OF *ICT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING, A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE*

### ICT and Language Learning, A European Perspective

Language Learning and Language Technology Series

Angela Chambers and Graham Davies (Eds.)

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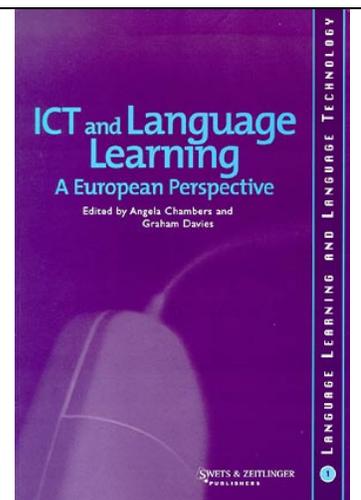
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#### Reviewed by Erin M. Halm, Johns Hopkins University

According to editor Angela Chambers, in Europe, "multilingualism and language diversity are considered as priorities, not only in the economic sphere as a means of ensuring the mobility of workers, but also in the political context of European integration " (p. 7). As a result, the European Commission has given collaborative language projects significant attention, in particular, those dealing with Information and Communication Technologies and education. The papers in *ICT and Language Learning, A European Perspective* present the results of some of these collaborative projects and emphasize "the ways in which the use of technology in language learning may be firmly embedded in a theoretical or pedagogical context" (p. 7).

The 11 papers in this volume consist, for the most part, of discussions of the challenges that computer-assisted language learning (CALL) has faced historically and of those it currently faces. Rather than present much in the way of new research, the authors mainly review practical examples and argue for prioritizing clear theoretical and pedagogical principles when integrating technology into language teaching. Finally, they hope to contribute to the efforts of the European Commission to create a "virtual European education area" involving cross-cultural cooperation (p. 8).

In "New technologies and language learning: A suitable subject for research?" Graham Davies discusses the academic recognition of research in the area of new technology and language learning. Such research is often not recognized because it does not take place within a definable theoretical framework. Furthermore, it tends to result in the development of teaching materials and approaches to language teaching, areas which are not considered valid for research by many universities. Davies identifies various areas of CALL in which research is needed, naming issues of learner autonomy, motivation, use of the Internet, and multimedia technology as priorities. He also suggests that scholars engaging in this type of research should clearly define their methods of investigation, tie their research to theories of second language acquisition, and expand their theoretical base to include the research and practice from other disciplines like linguistics, psychology, and education. As would be expected, and as most people currently working in the field would agree, Davies believes that CALL is a suitable subject for research, and notes that it is a growing discipline that is likely to continue to expand.

"Learner autonomy and the challenges of tandem language learning via the Internet" and "Learner autonomy, self-instruction and new technologies in language learning: Current theory and practice in higher education in Europe," authored by David Little and Jeanette Littlemore, respectively, deal with issues of learner autonomy, self-instruction, and CALL. Little's chapter opens with a discussion of the problems of self-access systems, or systems in which learners work on their own, noting that some universities have invested in these systems thinking that they would save money by having to hire fewer teachers. However, this is never the reality, and choosing this route presents other types of commitments and problems. The vast majority of learners are not fully autonomous learners who are capable of managing and evaluating their own learning process. Little therefore concludes that any self-access system must also incorporate ways in which students can learn to manage and regulate the learning process for themselves. He suggests tandem learning, a type of language exchange via e-mail or chat rooms, as one way to deal with this issue, and goes on to discuss in more practical terms how such exercises can be set up for effective language learning.

Littlemore's chapter compares current theories of learner autonomy in the higher education system in Europe with the actual practice of universities. The programs that have been most successful in achieving learner autonomy through the use of technology, according to Littlemore, have a clear understanding of the need for strategy training to help students become aware of their own learning. Such strategy instruction helps students to develop the skills and tools to self-evaluate and thus, improve the learning process.

"Criteria for the evaluation of Authoring Tools in language education," co-authored by David Bickerton, Tony Stenton, and Martina Temmerman, is a useful discussion of authoring tools and how an individual or institution might approach the task of evaluating and selecting appropriate tools for his or her particular needs. From a very practical standpoint, the chapter addresses many ways in which authoring tools might be evaluated, including establishing a list of desired features, determining whether or not implementation of a given tool is feasible in different contexts, assessing the skills of the user population, and finally, quantifying such features like the range, ease of use, users, and costs.

In "DISSEMINATE or not? Should we pursue a new direction: Looking for a 'third way' in CALL development?" Philippe Delcloque presents arguments for DISSEMINATE, his idea for a potential operating system that he believes could be useful in CALL as well as computer assisted learning in general. As the author states, "Increasingly, the necessity to have a deep reflection on the various components and actors in the process of CALL courseware production is particularly crucial. This might involve an examination of content, media, enabling tools, physical (hardware) support, human factors, collaboration, implementation, evaluation and dissemination" (p. 68). After a discussion of the history and development of the various phases of CALL, Delcloque goes on to present Gagnepain's theory of mediation as a justification for his proposal, and then attempts to define each component of his proposed DISSEMINATE system. Delcloque presents many interesting ideas for discussion, but does not address from a practical standpoint how any of his ideas could be implemented, or whether the technology exists to put his ideas into practice.

In "CALL material structure and learner competence," Jean-Claude Bertin presents the results of a survey he conducted investigating the relationship between learners' linguistic success and their expectations regarding autonomy. Using this survey as his point of departure, Bertin encourages language teachers to take advantage of new technology to "diversify the pedagogic structure of the materials they use or design and to match their learners' needs and levels of competence as closely as possible" (p. 97). In essence, what he argues is that recent multimedia language learning materials make it easier for teachers to develop a more flexible learner-centered curriculum that allows for customization to different learner types and learning styles. This is certainly true. However, one could argue with Bertin's claim that "very limited computer skills" are needed to achieve such goals, as one of the largest impediments to convincing teachers to create computer-based materials is often the technology itself. Particularly for

those working outside of Europe, it would have been interesting if Bertin had included information about the level of computer training and skills of language educators as well as about the role of the educational technologist in Europe.

"From gap-filling to filling the gap: A reassessment of Natural Language Processing in CALL," written by Sake Jager, and "Human Language Technologies in Computer-assisted language learning," written by Mathias Schulze, deal with natural language processing and human language technologies. Jager reviews the state of the art in speech processing technology and argues that in order for this type of technology to be useful for language instruction, it will be important for language engineers to work closely with language teachers and course designers. Schulze reviews the use of human language technology, particularly programs like grammar checkers and spell-checkers, and notes that the largest problem with this type of software is its inability to anticipate all possible linguistic outcomes in a given situation, which often results in errors being missed or correct answers being characterized as errors. However, he concludes that the software is improving.

In "Learning out of control: Some thoughts on the World Wide Web in learning and teaching foreign languages," Thomas Vogel presents his thoughts on the use of the World Wide Web in foreign language learning and teaching. Specifically, he is interested in whether the Web can be said to constitute a new naturalistic language-learning environment and truly address the challenge of "authenticity" that the regular language classroom faces. Through a small-scale study, Vogel questioned 55 students at his university to determine if they consciously use the Web for language learning. His results showed that none of the students specifically surfed the Web in order to learn foreign languages; rather they were generally in search of information of some sort. However, they did appear to have some feeling that their regular Web surfing activities might be helping their foreign language skills, as they needed to read and understand the foreign language information. Vogel concludes that there are many features of the Web that function like a naturalistic language environment. However, he criticizes many recent Web pages designed specifically for language learning, maintaining that they are not examples of pedagogy-driven technology. Instead, "The learner is faced with a technologically advanced, consumer-friendly version of his textbook from the sixties, with Web pages created by designers who know more about Web design than about new methodological approaches in language learning" (p. 139). He concludes with various practical suggestions for integrating the Web into the classroom.

In "Concordances in the classroom: The evidence of the data," Joseph R zeau discusses the use of computer-based concordances in the classroom and presents various concordance-based exercises he used to help his French-speaking students employ more inductive strategies when studying English grammar. He notes that although these exercises were extremely useful, there are limitations for using concordances, as not all genres of texts are appropriate. Nonetheless, he concludes that, "once you have started relying on the evidence of the data for checking the 'rules' found in grammar books as well as your own 'intuitions' about language, concordances tend to become an indispensable tool" (p. 154).

"ReLaTe: A case study in videoconferencing for language teaching," by John Buckett and Gary Stringer, describes research that they carried out jointly with the University College, London, as part of a project investigating videoconferencing and language teaching. The main goal of the project was to demonstrate the use of multimedia conferencing to share language teaching resources and to increase language learners' access to resources and classes not available in their communities or schools. Although their results were favorable overall, and they demonstrated the feasibility of teaching foreign languages over a network, there were some problems, such as variable audio and video quality. However, the authors note that this technology is improving, and they are hopeful that remaining issues will be resolved soon.

In general, *ICT and Language Learning, A European Perspective* presents some interesting points for discussion concerning the integration of CALL technology into the larger theoretical and pedagogical context. The book touches on some of the most relevant issues facing researchers in this field, namely, the

problem of recognition of such research by the larger scientific community, the struggle to insure that the available technology is used appropriately and serves a valid pedagogical purpose, and the need to determine whether CALL actually enhances learning. However, these are not new issues to the field, and this volume does not add much in the way of new material to the discussion of these problems nor does it present any new solutions to the problems posed. For an educator who has never thought about integrating technology into language learning, this volume might be a good introduction to some of the basic challenges and successes. However, those who have "been there and done that" and have been struggling and attempting to resolve most of these issues for quite some time, will probably not find much new information to work with here.

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#### **ABOUT THE REVIEWER**

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