

REVIEW OF *COMPUTER-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING: DIVERSITY IN RESEARCH AND PRACTICE*

Computer-Assisted Language Learning: Diversity in Research and Practice

Glenn Stockwell (Ed.)

2012

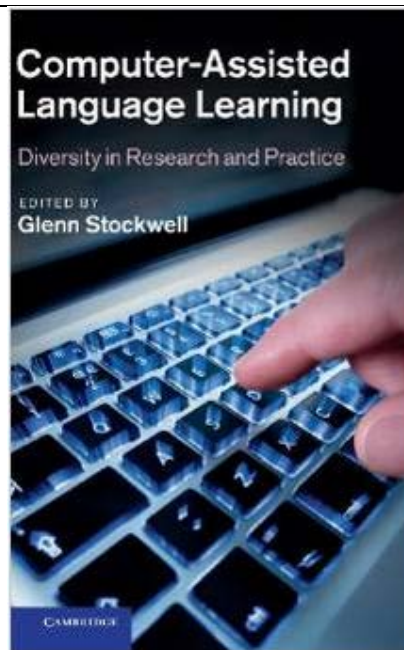
ISBN: 9781107016347

US \$96.56

213 pp.

Cambridge University Press

Cambridge, UK



Review by Judith C. Bridges, University of South Florida

Glenn Stockwell's 2012 edited volume, *Computer Assisted Language Learning: Diversity in Research and Practice*, compiles a collection of research studies that provide a thorough account of how complex and diverse the study of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is today. The volume portrays this diversity in all the many aspects of CALL including technologies, environments, pedagogies used, the CALL users, and research methods employed. While maintaining an inclusive focus on wide diversity throughout the volume, Stockwell provides a comprehensive and comprehensible construction of the breadth and scope of CALL.

Stockwell makes it clear that although the book is not intended to be a how-to guide for using certain CALL technologies, its purpose is to sensibly present to readers the diversity of language learning technologies, as well as the ways in which they can be used in various settings. Regardless of the types of learners, classroom environments, training, support, content and/or technology that readers have in mind, applications of CALL are the central focus in this volume.

This book is recommended as a useful resource for anyone needing to understand the wide range of computer-assisted language learning from the perspective of the 12 international expert contributors. First, Chapter 1 introduces the topic by providing an unequivocal description of the breadth of the field and by categorizing the subject in a straightforward manner. It takes into account the increasing range of technologies accessible in CALL, as well as the varying pedagogical practices and theories in CALL. Secondly, information about the relationship between the language learners and the numerous aspects of CALL are offered in Chapters 2, 3, and 4. Chapters 5 through 8 provide a thorough portrayal of the different contexts and procedures of CALL. As the title of the book suggests, all of the chapters are heavily focused on revealing the extensive diversity of the practices and research of the numerous attributes in CALL. More importantly, however, each chapter systematically addresses a specific portion of the field of CALL, and each chapter offers the same range of material: definitions, background context, general issues, overview, specific examples, and implications.

The volume is divided into 10 chapters and also includes a helpful list of figures, tables, and abbreviations, as well as a list of websites in the appendices. There is also a glossary of terms at the end of the book that not only provides definitions of Second Language Acquisition terminology, but also includes descriptions of specific technologies and technical terms that readers may not otherwise know (e.g., *Creative Commons*, *SCORM*, and *HTML5*.)

In Chapter 1, Stockwell forms the foundation of the book by examining the main issues in the field of CALL and by identifying the theme of diversity presented throughout. This chapter also covers an analysis of theory in CALL research and practice, and it not only lists some of the many theories used in CALL, but also explains that it is natural and necessary to have multiple theories in order to try to account for the complexity of CALL. Stockwell then simplifies the discussion in a way that helps the reader grasp the immense diversity of theory in CALL. He further discusses the affordances (i.e. the enabling or restricting of capabilities) of technology in language learning, as well as issues of learner autonomy. Finally, Stockwell gives an overview of the name “CALL” and why it has endured over other acronyms to describe the use of technology in second language learning and teaching.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 shift the focus squarely onto learners. Chapter 2, “Diversity in Learner Usage Patterns” by Fischer, offers a review and analysis of literature on how students actually use CALL materials, along with the various ways researchers study students’ usage of CALL software. The chapter addresses questions such as how similarly or differently students use CALL tools and resources, and if they use them in the ways that developers intended. More holistic questions are attended to as well, such as why it is important to study how students use CALL materials. After providing an overview of learner usage patterns, the author presents four studies that demonstrate numerous patterns in learner usage of CALL materials, and in the chapter includes quantitative data and charts. The implications of this chapter are important for researchers, software developers, and teachers, as the analyses reveal patterns in how different types of students use CALL software in varying ways.

In Chapter 3, Hubbard and Romeo identify two dimensions of the topic: the training processes and the variety of people being trained. The goal of combining these two components is to provide a wider overview of the area in order to point out the tremendous importance of learner training in CALL. The chapter examines the significance of learner training, as well as the unresolved issues deriving from learners’ individual differences and training needs. The authors emphasize that learners do not always properly utilize digital tools and materials, and consequently, technology can too easily be undervalued, often due to insufficient training. Therefore, learner training is an area in much need for more attention, especially considering the complexity of the technologies and learners.

Chapter 4, “Diversity in Learner Support,” by Reinders and Darasawang, is the last chapter that focuses on learners. It emphasizes issues in language support, methods, and materials that promote language learning beyond the classroom. The chapter’s objective is to underscore the idea that successful language learning skills cannot be obtained in the classroom alone; language support is essential for learners to independently build upon what they have acquired in the classroom. Features of the diverse range of language support highlighted in this chapter include the roles of interaction, sharing materials, multimedia, feedback, as well as learner empowerment.

The next section of the book, Chapters 5 through 8, examines the diversity of the tools and technologies in Computer-Assisted Language Learning, and the countless ways that CALL is a vehicle of information for language learners. Chapter 5, “Diversity in Environments” presents the range of CALL environments such as face-to-face courses, blended environments, distance learning, virtual worlds, social networks, and games. Stockwell and Tanaka-Ellis explain how complex each of these environments is and offer a clear and concise report of the history, classification, and diversity of each environment. In addition, the authors describe the relationship between CALL environments and their authenticity, support for varying learning processes, and giving feedback.

Chapter 6 covers perhaps the most boundless and ever-changing aspect of the field of CALL: the diversity in the content of CALL tools and materials. In this chapter, Johnson and Brine describe the enormous scope of the field, especially considering that educational technology is advancing and multiplying in inexorably fast rates, not to mention the resulting factors of so many competing technologies such as licensing, networking, sustainability, and quality assurance. One interesting part of the chapter is its focus on open-educational resources (OER) and open license agreements, and how these pertain to CALL. The authors also examine how OER and OSS (open-source software) tools can provide new approaches to the organization, presentation, and use of content in various learning environments. The implications are that teachers working in underfunded contexts have the technological means to create and control their own repertoire of language teaching materials in a way that is exclusive to the learning needs of their students. The employment of their materials can be flexible to the wide range of topic-, age-, and level-specific content, without having to worry about the cost, convenience, or practicality of previous types of educational materials.

The next chapter, “Diversity in Modalities,” tackles what might be considered the least defined aspect of CALL: multimodalities. Lamy discusses the concept of modality in CALL by exploring the purported advantages of different modes. She describes these modalities as ranging from image, video, icon, audio, or text. She also examines multi-modality, which combines these multiple semiotic resources for different constellations of written, spoken, or visual language. Lamy discusses how this seemingly endless combination of modes can work to enhance or to hinder learning, depending on the learning conditions.

In Chapter 8, “Diversity in Technology” Bateson and Daniels offer a helpful follow-up to Chapter 7, as this chapter examines the actual range of technologies available in CALL and the rationale for using these different technologies. They describe the ways in which educators deal with the challenge of choosing from such a variety of software, hardware, and websites. Their chapter tackles this wide range by categorizing the technologies—both of the past and the present—as multi-server, single-server, single personal computer, or mobile technologies. Consequently, readers gain a clear overview of various types of educational technologies, and also the issues involved in incorporating them into various contexts.

Chapters 9 and 10 are also written by Stockwell. In Chapter 9, he calls attention to research, practice, and technology as three focal points in the field of CALL: it covers the ways in which the three have interacted. Stockwell offers an invaluable resource for readers: an analysis of 808 published articles from ten years’ of research in CALL. He identifies seven different approaches taken for combining research, practice, and technology in various ways, for example, investigating the use of a technology for its applicability to language learning, or discussing a concept, theory, or pedagogy related to CALL. He then details each approach, and also provides three sample studies. This chapter shows how the range of research has allowed CALL to become a field with an endless need for more research, especially in questions that explore motivations, effects, and goals across so many diverse factors. Those undertaking research in this field, Stockwell urges, must not become entangled in the complexities of CALL, but rather, should focus on those features that can be practical in their own contexts. Awareness of the interplay between research, practice, and technology helps promote the progress and enhancement of CALL.

In chapter 10, Stockwell breaks down the diversity of CALL into individual, institutional, and societal levels while providing descriptions of how each level overlaps and interacts. Stockwell interlaces arguments and themes from throughout the book, such as the various influences of learners, environments, and technologies on the complex matrix of language learning. The final chapter addresses the leitmotifs of the entire book, which carry the most influence on individual learners, learner groups, teachers, researchers, and CALL materials.

In sum, this collection by Stockwell and the contributors invite the reader to deliberate whether the extensive range of technologies in language learning, alongside their many characteristics, is a positive

aspect or a negative one. In other words, is diversity in CALL a problem that needs to be solved, or is it a welcomed attribute of CALL that should be embraced? While discussing many responses to this question, Stockwell and the many contributors also remind the reader of the ever-shifting and unpredictable nature of all aspects of language learning technology. After this abundance of information, Stockwell lastly provides a list of the most pivotal points raised in the research and practice of CALL, such as the importance of knowing what learners actually do with CALL materials and why, or the need for educators to remain aware of technological developments and their potential usages in language teaching. The book successfully manages to handle the task of organizing and explaining a tremendous amount of information in a way that makes it straightforward for readers. A recurring statement throughout the book is that the mere presence of technology does not guarantee successful or worthwhile use of computers in educational contexts. Such a theme underscores the value of this book, because it offers a deep understanding of CALL. As a result, it is clear that *Computer-Assisted Language Learning: Diversity in Research and Practice* is a reliable guide for educators and researchers interested in carrying out research in the field, using CALL components, or becoming well-informed in computer-assisted language learning.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Judith Bridges is a doctoral student in Second Language Acquisition and Instructional Technology at the University of South Florida (USF) and received her Master's in Linguistics from Missouri State University. She teaches French, Linguistics, and ESL, and her research interests include L2 teacher education, language ideologies, CALL, and curriculum development.

E-mail: jbbridges@usf.edu