

Book Review

***Computer-Assisted Foreign Language Teaching and Learning: Technological Advances* by Zou, B., Xing, M., Wang, Y., Sun, M., & Xiang, C. H. (2013).** Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 356 pages, Hardcover \$175.00, ISBN13: 9781466628212.

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Levy (1997) defined computer-assisted language learning (CALL) as “the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning” (p.1). With the advancement of technology, the term “computer” in CALL is expanded to include more concepts such as software depicting the virtual classroom, technology tools that could be used in a blended language course, assessment and training tools, interactive and collaborative online forums, and various types of copula curating authentic language in different contexts. The ongoing development of information technology prompts the continuous search for the applications of the computer in foreign and second language teaching and learning.

Over the past few years, the debate on *whether* foreign language teaching and learning should be assisted with computers or technology tools has shifted to the question of *how* foreign language teaching and learning should be enhanced with computers and technology tools. The development of technology has shed light on the further exploration of pedagogies of second language acquisition. For many experienced language teachers who have strived to embrace new technologies or methodologies that integrate technology tools, this book draws a comprehensive picture of how language teaching could be enhanced with computers.

The authors of the book are from four different countries: Australia, China, the UK and the USA, which could provide a more panoramic picture of computer-assisted foreign language teaching and learning across the globe. The topic of the book also indicates the interdisciplinary nature of the original research shown in the book.

The content of the book defines it as a useful reference book for language teachers and learners who are searching for the efficacious integration between foreign language teaching and learning and technology. The book is composed of eighteen chapters and each chapter on its own

is either a research on the topic of computer-assisted language teaching or the summary of findings in this respect. Therefore, the tone of the book is academic and formal. However, the elevated language of academic style does not prevent people from reaping the applications of the findings. To the contrary, the academic style is the highlight of the book as it shows the readers that the research and experiments in the book were conducted based on the synthesis of inclusive previous research which hence pointed out a clear research gap. Furthermore, with the academic writing conventions, readers could have easy access to the relevant research paper cited in each chapter and find future research possibilities and implications of research more readily in the discussion or conclusion section. For instance, Chapter One of the book presented a study which connects English students who are learning Business Chinese in the UK and Chinese students who are studying Business English in China using a wiki. The pedagogical applications of the paper could be found in the conclusion part of the paper that entails defining a wiki as a platform for language practice and cultural exchange (p.11).

The availability of various original studies in the book also makes it a research design resource for graduate students who are interested in language education and language learning with technology, because the research included in the book include various languages such as Chinese, English and French and in different contexts: business language classrooms as well as writing courses. The large variety of research subjects and conditions depicted in the book gives prospective graduate students the opportunity to visualize the nature of conducting research and allow educators to link research findings with pedagogical approaches.

The organization of the book assists the understanding of the general audience, which presents a summary of the CALL theories, concepts and the perspectives of teachers and students who are key players in CALL classrooms. The whole book addresses three aspects of CALL: the major theories and development of CALL, the participants involved in CALL—teachers and learners, and the course design using CALL technologies and methodologies. The arrangement of the three sections aims to present a seamless logic for different audiences, be they experienced researchers in the field, language instructors or foreign language learners who have an interest in CALL.

Section One functions as the background information on CALL for the lay audience. Therefore, this book is not abstruse even for educators who have little knowledge of computer-assisted language teaching and learning. The essential topics covered in the first section include

the role that online platforms, social networking sites and online assessments can play in different foreign language classrooms and courses with respect to interaction, collaboration and academic literacy. All these quintessential concepts and theories were illustrated with real teaching and learning contexts and although the majority of the findings indicate a promising future of CALL, the negative parts of the online tools were also noted. This is another positive facet of employing academic papers in the book: it diminishes the biases that authors might have towards CALL and the findings presented are objective.

Section Two moves from the theory building to the analysis of the participants of CALL: teachers and learners. Readers could procure a more vivid understanding of how both groups of participants respond to CALL, their personal feelings and the outcome of teaching and learning to apply CALL. One word that repeatedly appeared in this section is “perception.” How students perceive the new media age and the use of related technologies in the course of language learning is the ultimate question that serves as the primary conspectus of the section. The secondary aim of the section is to demonstrate several effective ways that have been adopted in the foreign language classrooms.

Section Three demonstrates a shift of focus from theory to real application of CALL theories and different prospects of foreign language teaching including listening, pronunciation, vocabulary, independent learning and adult instruction as well as the designing of language learning software. Instructors and IT personnel who are looking for ideas about how to tie technologies with language teaching could obtain insights from this section. Case studies in this section span from the online course design to distinct training modules for different language programs. Not all the case studies will apply to the readers, but they do include a range of possible educational settings that readers might be in. This part of the book presents language instructors feasible ways and methods to fully embrace technologies in specific facets of language teaching.

Although the book does not have a storytelling feature which some readers might expect from a book which explains how educators have used technologies in language teaching, it does have a seamless theme across all the separate papers. Under the guiding key phrase: *technologies and language teaching*, authors of the book managed to select relevant and most updated papers in the area and connect these papers in such a way that they follow the basic logic of understanding new concepts: from the introduction of the major definitions, to the discussion of

the interplay between the participants in the innovative ideas and eventually to the showcase of possible ways of integrating technologies into language teaching. Due to the clear presentation of the theme, this book will therefore be helpful to those educators who have a strong interest in language teaching with the new technologies. However, because of the academic nature of the papers chosen for the book, this book will appear to be challenging to readers who are not familiar with the English academic writing style and less proficient in English. Furthermore, for those readers who care more about the ways of applying CALL than how the authors and researchers reached the conclusion, one reading suggestion is to focus more on the discussion and conclusion parts of papers.

In general, this book is an up to date compilation of studies in the area of computer-assisted language and learning which could serve readers' needs of searching and studying the use of computer in the process of language teaching and learning. Researcher could use this book as a literature review of previously conducted research in the discipline and educators could refer to this book as the theoretical guidebook to understand the feasible applications of technology tools in language teaching and learning. The fact that the book is composed of individual academic paper lends credit to the findings of the research and hence the feasibility of the applications concluded from the findings.

References

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