

## *Book review*

*Teaching and Researching Computer-Assisted Language Learning*, Ken Beatty.  
Second Edition. London, Pearson Education, 2010. ISBN13: 9781408205006.  
ISBN10: 1408205009. 284 pages. Price: €47

The evolving nature of computer-assisted language learning, constantly influenced by technological innovations, and the new contributions from an emerging research community called for a new edition of *Teaching and Researching Computer-Assisted Language Learning*, first published in 2003. Ken Beatty presents now, seven years later, a revised edition that offers an updated overview of CALL research, practice and resources.

In the words of the author, the book aims at helping in establishing the directions of computer-assisted language learning not only by discussing “what we know and do not know” (p. 2), but also “by offering ways in which classroom teachers as researchers can look for answers on their own” (p. 2). This second edition builds on the philosophy and the structure of the first. Thus, the reader will not find major changes in terms of content or layout. The volume is organised into four sections, of which the first three constitute the core of the book. They are supplemented by a fourth section which offers resources for teachers and researchers. As for the layout of the chapters, no significant additions or modifications are detected. The text is complemented by boxes containing quotations, definitions, examples, or recommendations for further reading. A brief summary is also provided at the end of each chapter.

Section I (*Key concepts*) is devoted to the clarification of basic concepts in computer-assisted language learning, including hypertext, hypermedia and multimedia, and to tracing the history of CALL back to the 1950s. It is in chapter 2 (*A brief history of CALL*) that we find the first significant update with respect to the first edition, as the recent history of the field is considered. The final chapter in this section provides an outline of eight CALL applications such as word processing, corpus linguistics or Internet resources. The second section (*The place of CALL in research and teaching*) is the most comprehensive of all three, and begins by relating computer-assisted language learning to second language learning theories to later on offer a model of CALL as well as different theoretical and pedagogical concerns. Chapter 5 (*Second-Language Acquisition and models of instruction*) has been reorganised and the seven subsections in the 2003 edition have been condensed into five.

Chapter 6 (*Collaboration and negotiation of meaning*) stands out from the rest by presenting a comprehensive, although concise, overview of collaboration grounded in sound theory that can be a reasonable starting point for newcomers to the field. The author addresses terminological inconsistencies regarding the notions of ‘collaboration’, ‘cooperation’ and ‘teamwork’ and also summarises the benefits and challenges to collaboration in computer-based instruction contexts. In addition, at the end of the chapter, Beatty provides a very interesting approach to the analysis of collaboration and negotiation of meaning based on discourse analysis which is complemented by a complete list of strategies that students use when they engage in or avoid collaboration and a set of notations for transcribing discourse. Probably, the weakest point of this chapter is the narrow view of the field that the author conveys by establishing such a strong link between CALL and computer programs. The chapter describes scenarios where collaboration *at* the computer is possible but they are in most cases related to using software in the classroom and no explicit mention is made to the opportunities to collaborate *through* the computer. The author misses here the chance to introduce computer-mediated communication, where students collaborate by means of web 2.0 applications such as wikis, blogs or social networks.

In chapter 7 the author presents a CALL model, while chapter 8 discusses theoretical and pedagogical concerns for the integration of CALL. Among these concerns we find aspects of such diverse nature as lack of funds and expertise, safety online, or plagiarism on the one hand, and learning styles or the need for teachers to evaluate and classify learning software according to the model of instruction it promotes on the other hand. Because of the amount of variables that come into play in any learning situation, defining a model of CALL is far from being an easy task and even more, as the author acknowledges, if a broad definition of CALL – “any process in which a learner uses a computer and, as a result, improves his or her language” (p. 143) – is adopted. Even so, in chapter 7, Beatty adapts the model for learning proposed by Dunkin and Biddle in the 1970s to a model for CALL. His proposal centres around the interrelations between presage variables (materials developers’ experiences and the conceptions of different models of instruction), process variables (related to the computer program), context variables (the learners and the institution) and product variables (changes in the learner as a result of using the program). This model seems, inevitably, quite restrictive and narrow, as it is confined to a very specific type of CALL environment; that in which the computer program becomes “a kind of virtual teacher” (p. 158). Although a general discussion concerning the role and behaviour of students and teachers when using different learning resources (constructivist vs. behaviourist) is presented in these two chapters, they lack a stronger reference to the current status of CALL or indications for future directions, something that Bax accurately addressed in his 2003 article, where he first introduced the notion of *normalisation*.

The examination of research practice in the field is addressed in Section 3 (*Researching CALL*), where Beatty first presents an account of up-to-date research interests based upon the analysis of 102 studies and then outlines how research can be conducted in what he terms eight research contexts. Because of the rapid evolution of the field, Chapter 9 (*Current research interests*) unveils as a fully updated version of the same chapter in the 2003 edition. The structure and topics are the same

but this time the author concentrates on articles published between 2006 and 2009. The analysis of the 102 articles helps the author draw a picture of what we may call the *trending topics* in CALL research regarding languages, skills, processes, technologies, concerns and subjects. This survey exemplifies the changing nature of CALL, as it illustrates how interest shifts from one aspect to another in just a few years. This is the case, for instance, with the processes reported in the studies under examination. While in the 2003 edition of the book 42 per cent of the articles dealt with the process of creating or developing materials, only 20 percent of the 102 articles reported in this volume do so. Updated references are also evident in chapter 10 (*Research*), where the author offers a precise and detailed account of different research contexts and methodologies supplemented by a step by step description of *model* research projects pertinent to each context. These two chapters stress the importance of action research and serve to illustrate the thin line that separates teachers from researchers these days.

The final section (*Resources and Glossary*) presents major restructuring with respect to the 2003 edition. To begin with, the title of the section has been expanded to make a more explicit reference to the glossary of key terms, one of the most useful sections of this volume. While almost all the subsections are kept, some of them, such as “Software mentioned” or “e-mail lists”, have been omitted or modified. As in the first edition, the list of resources is accompanied by a glossary of key terms, an index and a list of references. The reference list has become a sort of bibliography instead, as the author warns the reader that a number of works listed there are kept from the first edition even though they are not cited in the 2010 text.

As stated in the back cover, this volume is of interest to “all teachers and researchers interested in using CALL to make language learning a richer, more productive and more enjoyable task”. We would add that the informative style of the volume makes it a useful starter reading for graduate students and novice researchers (a) wishing to gain further knowledge of the field of CALL and (b) trying to chart those portions of *terra incognita* (to use the author’s metaphor in the introduction) that are part of the map of CALL. Given the amount of practical information, examples and useful resources, the book (in particular chapters 3 and 4 and the glossary of key terms) is sure to be particularly welcomed by trainee teachers willing to integrate CALL within their future teaching practice. If anything, the amount of further reading sections, quotes, examples and concepts may distract the reader who simply wishes to be immersed in the reading of a book which does not address trainees so overtly. But, obviously, this is a matter of personal preference which does not affect the clearly presented contents of the book.

However, a volume which embraces such a fertile and emerging topic cannot escape criticism. The extent and scope of the readership should not serve as an excuse for not offering a more updated view on topics such as *technology driving CALL* (pp. 12-15) or the eight CALL applications in Chapter 4, which, fundamentally, remain exactly the same in the two editions of the book. While the author outlines some more recent innovations in the field in a new section named *CALL in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, the eight CALL applications which are dealt with in Chapter 4 are those which were already treated seven years ago. For example, the section devoted to word processing is left intact, although further reading includes two references

published after the first edition of the book. This is generally the case with the rest of sections in the book, something which will be greatly appreciated by the novice practitioner. The impact of social networks and contributions of web 2.0 are underdiscussed. The research on blogs and wikis does not receive much attention, and sometimes is restricted to generalities like “Teachers are also making use of wikis, social networking sites and web tools to create learning opportunities for students” (p. 71), of little value even for novice CALL practitioners. Learning management systems are not discussed at all, and *Moodle* only appears in the glossary.

Overall, this edition is apparently indebted in excess of the *inheritance* from his predecessor. We may argue that Beatty has relied too heavily on the original structure and *text* of the first edition of the book, but it is nonetheless true that new editions are usually like this: an updated text which has been modified to suit the needs of a new readership. On balance, *Teaching and Researching Computer-Assisted Language Learning* provides CALL students and future researchers with a very accessible introduction to the key concepts and ideas in the field in one single volume.

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### Reference

Bax S. (2003) “CALL – past, present and future”. *System*, **31**(1): 13–28.