Review

Multilingual computer assisted language learning (a review)

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A new methodology and a new technology and pedagogic strategy of delivery are the key themes of this book. Buendgens-Kosten and Elsner teach at the Goethe University in Frankfurt in Germany and are convinced that the pedagogy of the one-language teaching method, either in L1 or in L2 and occasionally a mixture of both where translation is an aid to comprehension, is out of date. This is due to the increase in globalisation with the vastly increased movement of people around the world both for work and to live and the accelerated speed and volume of international communication made possible by the Internet, with the myriad and increasing ICT applications being used by people around the world but not as widely in language learning.

The key for Buendgens-Kosten and Elsner is not a first or even a second foreign language learned at school or university but multilingualism. They define it as the *'co-existence or co-presence of two or more languages within and without language learning contexts'.* They stress the need to look at language and language learning from a multilingual perspective, citing the Council of Europe in 2011 saying, *'a multilingual perspective not only rejects a compartmentalised view of languages and language learning, it furthermore appraises all languages and any kind of language competence as meaningful'.*

The editors also recognise the vital role that ICTs now play in everyday life and in language use and language learning. Foreign language now comes from all corners of the earth not just in classrooms but on T-shirts, pop music, advertising and movies and people spend more time on mobiles and computers than they ever spend in classrooms. This is why CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) is so important but needs to incorporate a multilingual not just a mono- or bilingual

approach. The editors call this MCALL (Multilingual CALL) and describe it like this.

'Multilingual CALL is the study and practice of language learning, with digital media in non-monolingual contexts or settings using non-monolingual media. This may involve the use and/or activation of native language(s), previously studied language(s), heritage language(s) or dialects(s). Multilingual CALL can be multilingual due to the multilinguality of learners, due to the multilinguality of a group of learners (including telecollaboration or CMC settings) or due to the multilinguality of teaching material/tasks.'

MCALL involves the use of technological diversity in designing language training, providing teaching materials and offering opportunities for telecollaboration between remote classrooms, i.e. classrooms where students are not physically in the same place. The means used include chat rooms, computer games, digital stories and ebook apps, online texts and interactive whiteboards.

The book is divided into five sections, contains 13 essays plus an introduction, and ends with concluding remarks by Gabriela Meier at Exeter University in the UK. The five sections are *Multiliteracies and MCALL, Multilingual Texts, Intercomprehension and MCALL, Multilingual Online Exchange and Telecollaboration and*

MCALL, and *The Professional Development of Teachers.*

The essays include the use of online communication vehicles such as Facebook, computer games, home-made videos and cartoons, and using tablets. One of the great values of the MCALL approach is how it validates the learner's own language as a learning resource. This is very important for migrants who have recently moved home and have to fit into a new classroom environment and a new community. Knowing they have the means to refer to their own language(s) when they need to is a way of instilling confidence. The essays also stress another important aspect of MCALL – responsibility and community. Students can use their familiarity and ability with computers to take responsibility for examining their own languages and language(s) they are learning and share what they have learned with other students. This helps build both an online and face-to-face community of students as they act as language explorers, detectives and analysts, sharing what they have found out. The role of the teacher also changes from that of sole learning authority to that of coach, organiser and facilitator – a role already advocated in many teacher training courses.

MCALL can also build communication in the classroom, in the local area, nationally and internationally. Classrooms can link up

internationally, exchanging information about their own lives in different cultures as in the British Council's *Connecting Classrooms* initiative. This exchange enables students to overcome reservations about others and build empathy with them by learning about their lives. This can lead, as it does in *Connecting Classrooms,* to international class visits and exchanges. The recognition of local languages and cultures also helps the teacher build empathy with the students, understand any problems they may have and find ways to support and overcome them, as Cutrim Schmid and Si'ilata point out. As Antonie Alm writes in his essay, using Facebook in language learning, the aim changes from language learning to communication as a goal.

In her concluding comments, Gabriela Meier emphasises the importance of MCALL in encouraging a more collaborative understanding of learning. She stresses its value in individualising learning because it allows users to proceed at their own speed in the way that best suits them. It also gives the opportunity for the user to choose the language that best suits him or her. Above all, it brings into the 'classroom' what young people do every day outside it – use digital devices to pursue their own aims and enthusiasms.

The other feature she considers important is MCALL's multi-modal approach, including sound, music, maps, diagrams, photos, moving pictures

and emoticons. Much of this already exists in the conventional classroom, which also adds drama, body language, small group discussion and face-to-face roleplay. However, Meier recognises that MCALL offers better opportunities for repetition, looking up meanings and getting words and content from different languages. As she writes, *'The digital dimension potentially facilitates opportunities for self-regulated and autonomous learning, while the multilingual dimension offers opportunities for deep learning.'*

Meier recognises that online language resources intended for language learners may date faster and need updating and renewing more frequently than standard textbooks. However, she feels that a much wider range of resources is available on the open Internet than on educational digital media. But the open Internet has both advantages, in choice of content, and dangers, in exposure to inappropriate material and influences (grooming, hacking and even illegal activity through the Dark Web). It can also serve as distraction: instead of using computer as a learning resource students spend the time checking their Facebook pages.

Therefore, an important part of individualised MCALL learning is teacher education. Teachers need to be trained in how to help their students make the most of the computer as a language learning and language practice resource. This should be part of all language teacher training

courses and university post-graduate teacher training programmes. Teachers should also be trained to be aware of the downside of the open Internet and learn how to spot and deal with possibly malign influences. Critical media literacy should be an important part of both teacher and learner training and Meier cites one of the authors, Henriette Dausend, who says that *'technology alone doesn't make a good lesson'* and that lessons need to be carefully planned, with clear objectives. Most importantly, Meier believes that MCALL is an answer to the traditional monolingual approach to language learning in class and that students should be encouraged to use other

languages they have been exposed to or even been brought up to speak as part of their language learning journey. She also feels that learning languages should be more linked to students' own interests and needs and less just a school subject to be mastered and improve grades. MCALL can provide an avenue for this.

In summary, the book opens up an interesting field of research into the relationship between multilingualism and CALL and the thirteen papers show how teachers can use MCALL to develop linguistic growth both in the classroom and in professional development.