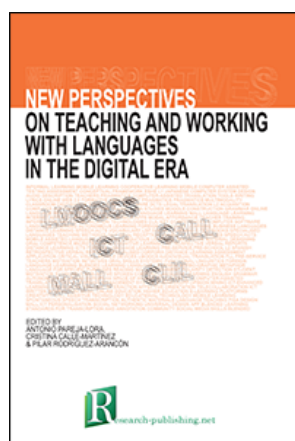


Book review

New perspectives on teaching and working with languages in the digital era

Reviewd by Rafael Seiz Ortiz
Universitat Politècnica de València, Spain

rseiz@idm.upv.es



New perspectives on teaching and working with languages in the digital era

Edited by Antonio Pareja-Lora, Cristina Calle-Martínez and Pilar Rodríguez-Arancón

Published by Research-publishing.net, Dublin, 2016

ISBN PDF (colour): 978-1-908416-35-3

ISBN PAPERBACK (black & white): 978-1-908416-34-6

ISBN EPUB (colour): 978-1-908416-36-0

<http://dx.doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2016.tislid2014.978190841635>

Computer technology has been used to assist language learning for a very long time. From the beginnings of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), back in the 1960s, a number of technologies, usually grouped under the term ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies), have been developed and implemented for educational purposes in general and in language teaching and learning in particular. As a result, a wide range of terms have emerged, describing new educational environments and paradigms, such as e-learning, Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), ICALL (Intelligent CALL), TELL (Technology-Enhanced Language Learning), blended learning, ubiquitous learning, among many others. Along this process of technological improvement and sophistication, the wider social context in which language learning takes place has also experienced a series of complex modifications to make the learning process more learner-centred, more focused on the needs of a global world, more active and more dynamic in many respects. Two significant examples of this educational shift in the field of language learning nowadays are, firstly, the need to learn at the student's own pace, independently from time and space constraints, and secondly, the global advent of a multidisciplinary group of new pedagogical approaches, environments and

methodologies, such as the Bologna Process in Europe, bilingual education, task-based and project-based learning (TBL and PBL), competence-based teaching and many others. In such a complex and challenging educational context, ICT-based language learning and teaching becomes a much more flexible and multifaceted endeavour, where the rapid technological development should go hand in hand with careful pedagogical reflection and the integration of key didactic issues, if we want to take full advantage of the potential of ICTs in language learning. Consequently, there is a need for pedagogical research on the new scenarios brought about by ICTs when they are integrated in the language learning process. Therefore, books like this one are necessary and welcome, as they help us understand the pedagogical potential of ICTs and know how to efficiently integrate them in language learning. The book is a comprehensive state-of-the-art account of the most innovative possibilities of ICTs to build up approaches and environments to enhance the language learning and teaching processes.

At a general level, five major characteristics of the book could be considered as its strong points. Firstly, it is based on research, which provides it with a sound theoretical background. The types of research methodologies that may be encountered throughout the book are varied, but every chapter is approached from thorough investigation and reflection of the matter at hand. Secondly, it also has a practical orientation, in two basic ways: it is full of feasible teaching ideas and it incorporates lots of case studies that show the potential of ICTs in the different areas under discussion. Thirdly, it is comprehensive, since it covers the most important areas, disciplines and scenarios of the use of ICTs for language learning. Fourthly, in close relation with the latter point, the work is multidisciplinary, with a professional discussion of a broad range of disciplines, from the most technical ones (e.g. corpus analysis and interface design) to the most pedagogical ones (e.g. collaborative learning, assessment and evaluation). Such a multiple perspective results in a series of relevant insights to do with the efficient use of ICTs in language education. And finally, the book takes an integrative standpoint, since most chapters combine more than one single technology and language learning approach. This is an added value of the use of ICTs in language learning and teaching, as teachers or researchers are not limited to just one point of view, but, on the contrary, they can enhance the language learning process with the synergy resulting from an integration of multiple technologies.

Building on the idea of the interdisciplinary nature of the book, an interesting reflection comes to the mind of the reader just from its title, with its reference to “teaching and working with languages”. Although most sections of the book are devoted to language learning and teaching assisted by ICTs, it also discusses at some point how communication technologies may help us in certain professions such as translation (see Chapters 30 or 31 for instance). This fact reflects the close relationship existing nowadays between learning a language and using it at work, which is particularly true in disciplines like translation studies or in legal contexts. It should be noted here that modern language learning and teaching approaches have undergone a paradigm shift towards authenticity, that is, connecting the learning of a language with what the learner needs to do with the target language (at work or elsewhere). In this respect, ICTs are ideal tools to assist these modern approaches related to learning-by-doing or life-long-learning, as can be clearly illustrated throughout the book.

This edited volume consists of 33 chapters structured in the form of research papers which deal with different areas and educational environments where ICTs and language learning and teaching merge. The structure of all the chapters is that of a research paper, including an abstract, literature review, research methodology with discussion of results, conclusions that point at possible areas of future research and relevant and updated bibliography. Thus, it somehow resembles a book of conference proceedings, which may mislead some readers. Nevertheless, the whole book has a high level of coherence that makes it look like a research handbook, with a language which is easier to understand for the general public than that commonly found in certain research papers. It provides plenty of data and examples to illustrate innovative ways of using ICTs in language learning, which is a very useful feature. The book could be also used to locate and categorize relevant literature and bibliographic references on the various topics under discussion. As regards the global structure of the book, it is divided into

three general sections. The first part (chapters 2 to 15) deals with how ICTs are normally being used in the context of language teaching and learning. This section can be further divided into three subsections: e-learning and languages in education, distance and life-long teaching and learning of languages, and, finally, interaction design, accessibility and usability. The second part of the book (chapters 16 to 26) discusses innovative trends and uses of ICTs for language teaching, and is, in turn, subdivided into three subsections: MALL, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and computer-assisted testing and assessment. The third and last big part of the book (chapters 27 to 33) deals with the applications of language technologies, that is, how computational linguistics and computer-assisted language resources and tools can be implemented in language learning and teaching.

As shown in this overview of the book's contents, it provides an exhaustive coverage of the most recent approaches and methodologies regarding the pedagogical use of ICTs in language learning and teaching. Although each chapter deals rather specifically with a particular technological and pedagogical domain, there are certain common findings, insights and conclusions shared by many chapters of the book. In the first place, it seems that several chapters make it clear that even though ICTs have great pedagogical possibilities in language learning, they are not being used to their full potential. And this is true both from the point of view of teachers and learners. As a consequence, several papers (chapters 2, 4, 6, 7, 9 and 11, for example) agree on the strong necessity of teacher training and of working hard to motivate the students when using ICTs for the purpose of language learning. Another point made jointly by different chapters is the fact that ICTs have the most positive impact on language learning and teaching when the technology is supported by a change in the teaching methods (chapter 5), as well as based on strong theoretical grounds (chapter 20), taking into consideration the prime importance of a didactically efficient interactivity design (chapter 14) and feedback support (chapter 25). A third coincidence found throughout the pages of the book has to do with eclecticism and the added value of mixing up in a coherent way not only different technologies in a given learning context, to avoid the limitations of using a single technology (see for instance chapters 10, 12, 15, 18, 19, 21 and 22), but also integrating different educational purposes within a given technology. On the other hand, several chapters of the book illustrate well how ICTs can efficiently be of use in areas of language learning that are of prime importance and have been often ignored by educational technology, such as oral skills (chapters 7 and 21) and pragmatics (chapter 12), for instance.

As Jordi Adell puts it on several occasions, including his personal website (<http://nti.uji.es/~jordi>), technology in education should be used either to allow us to do things that were not available to us in the past, or to help us to do in a better way what we did without full satisfaction. The book is full of examples of such a pedagogically relevant use of ICTs in language learning. An example of the former possibility (technology to carry out tasks that were not possible before) can be found in chapter 10, with the integration of telecollaboration via Skype and autonomous learning through language MOOCs, or in chapter 28, in the case of automatic processing of opinions. Examples of the latter possibility (to do old tasks in a more effective way by using ICTs) can be illustrated in chapters 24 and 25 (improvement of language testing) or in chapter 30 (error detection), among many others.

In summary, the book *New Perspectives on Teaching and Working with Languages in the Digital Era* is an updated record of the best use of ICTs in the field of language learning and teaching at present and it can be extremely useful at three basic levels. First, teachers will find examples of best practice along with practical teaching ideas and approaches when incorporating ICTs into their classes. Second, the book can also be useful for dynamic learners in search for new ways to improve their language learning processes. And last, but not least, it can be a valuable tool and resource for language learning researchers, to get an overview of state-of-the-art insights into the use of ICTs in language learning.