

Technology Assistance in Second Language Acquisition: Potentials and Limitations

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Technology has revolutionized not only our daily lives but also the way education is practiced around the world. The impact of technology has been far and wide both in physical and social sciences, as well as in arts and humanities. This immense influence has been observed in second language (L2) teaching, acquisition, and research. In L2 instruction, for example, technological tools are used by: (1) practitioners for pedagogical advances; (2) learners for classroom and self-learning; (3) researchers for exploring the effects of technology on language teaching and learning (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2009). Although the use of technology to assist L2 acquisition has been under investigation for the past few decades, there is still much to be explored. Apparently, more research on the role(s) of technology in L2 teaching, learning, and research is needed to gain a better and more nuanced understanding.

This edition of the forum comprises ten commentaries contributed by students from Prof. ZhaoHong Han's Advanced Second Language Acquisition (SLA) course at Teachers College, Columbia University in Spring 2011. Based on Bhatia and Ritchie's (2009) book chapter on the research and application of SLA in the information age, these commentaries probe into the benefits and limitations of technology in L2 teaching, learning, and research. These include (a) the roles and effects of technology vis-à-vis SLA research, (b) the use of technology both inside and outside the L2 classroom, (c) the potential of technology in providing learners with a variety of target language (TL) input, and (d) the implications of such applications for teacher education.

The commentary begins with Farah S. Akbar's discussion of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) design, research, and practice, in which she urges for increased interdisciplinary collaboration. She also talks about the need for increased CALL teacher education programs and courses for pre- and in-service teachers. In the second commentary, Charles H. Combs challenges the effect(s) of technology in L2 acquisition research and pedagogy, and calls for further research to specifically look into language areas that are more suitable to be delivered through technology in order to establish a case for the effectiveness of CALL. Adrienne Wai Man Lew then discusses the theories that have been driving the development of CALL, namely the cognitive SLA model, and sociocultural theory; she also looks into the dissociation between the theory and practice of CALL. On a more practical level, Zehua Liu compares and contrasts computer-mediated communication with face-to-face communication in L2 learning. Hiromi Noguchi, as a complement, addresses the various usages of technological tools (e.g., Wikis, blogs) on L2 instruction in general, and L2 writing in particular. This is followed by Cheng-Ling Alice Chen's discussion of the potentials and limitations of technology use in L2 acquisition. She specifically calls for a renewed focus on the design and implementation of technology in order to resolve the recurring issues related to the provision of a customized e-learning environment for L2 learners. On a related note, Shaoyan Qi examines the role of technology in providing learners with more L2 input. She maintains that the use of technology, despite all its merits, has not changed the fundamental concerns of the study of SLA; what it actually does is that it has transformed the way SLA researchers elicit their data. As far as data elicitation, Andrew Miller first sheds light on the topic of learner autonomy in CALL, and then refers to CALL as a possible avenue for eliciting data in L2 research. As for

teacher education in the realms of CALL, Mi Sun Park expresses the need for more professional training regarding the theoretical and methodological implications of technology in the L2 classroom. In the final commentary, Yayun Anny Sun discusses the promising roles played by CALL and computer-assisted second language acquisition research (CASLAR). She also highlights ways in which technology might be used to improve both the quantity and quality of L2 input, as well as the nature of interaction between technology and L2 input processing.

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REFERENCES

Bhatia, T. K., & Ritchie, W. C. (2009). Second language acquisition: Research and application in the information age. In W. C. Ritchie, & T. K. Bhatia (Eds.), *The new handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 545-565). Bingley: Emerald.

COMMENTARIES

1. [*CALL for SLA: Does its Benefits Outweigh its Costs?*](#)
[Farah Akbar](#)
2. [*CALL in the L2 Classroom: Possibilities and Limitations*](#)
[Charles Combs](#)
3. [*Aligning CALL with the Theory and Practice of Instructed SLA*](#)
[Adrienne Wai Man Lew](#)
4. [*CMC and Face-to-face Communication in L2 Learning*](#)
[Zehua Liu](#)
5. [*The Use of Technology In-and-outside of Second Language Classrooms: How, What, and Why?*](#)
[Hiromi Noguchi](#)
6. [*Extended Implications of Technology in Second Language Teaching and Learning*](#)
[Cheng-Ling Alice Chen](#)
7. [*Computer-Assisted Second Language Teaching, Learning, and Research*](#)
[Shaoyan Qi](#)

8. [*Technology's Impact on SLA: A Response to Bhatia and Ritchie \(2009\)*](#)
[Andrew Miller](#)
9. [*The Use of Technology In-and-Outside of Second Language Classrooms: The Need for Teacher Training in Technology*](#)
[Mi Sun Park](#)
10. [*Ensuring Effective Second-Language Learning in CALL*](#)
[Yayun Anny Sun](#)