

Computer-Assisted Second Language Teaching, Learning, and Research

Shaoyan Qi

Teachers College, Columbia University

Bhatia and Ritchie's (2009) book chapter provided preliminary answers to the following questions: (1) In what way(s) has computer technologies impacted second language (L2) teaching and learning inside and outside of classroom? (2) In what way(s) has computer technologies shaped the field of second language acquisition (SLA)?

While computer-assisted language learning (CALL) has not replaced traditional classroom learning, it has no doubt become an integral part or an extension of the latter. In other words, although language teachers will not lose their jobs to computers, they must learn to embrace technology so as to improve their teaching practices. In specific, the most important way in which technology has altered traditional language instruction is with regard to how it offers a much larger variety of input other than textbooks do, given that input is a core determinant of L2 learning (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2009). The Internet, for one, apparently provides instant access to unlimited amounts of authentic input in the target language for L2 learners; this has obvious advantages over traditional language textbooks. In addition, learners seem to experience much less anxiety when learning through the computer; they are likely to produce more output than in traditional classroom settings. On another note, computer technologies and the Internet have resulted in the democratization of interaction(s) between learners or between learners and native speakers, especially when they need to make concerted efforts to complete a language task.

That being the case, face-to-face interaction is still indispensable to any social practice and individual cognitive development – including language learning – in this information age. From a sociocultural perspective, cognitive development is the result of social interaction, especially that between individuals. Knowledge of language, for that matter, is developed through the interaction between the learner and a more proficient interlocutor (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Needless to say, then, any overuse of technology may substantially reduce face-to-face interaction, which might in turn have potentially negative impacts on language learning.

As far as research, technology has not changed the fundamental concerns of (a) why L2 acquisition is possible, and (b) how acquisition takes place. but it has transformed the way SLA researchers elicit interlanguage data, and holds special hope on tapping into L2 learner's implicit knowledge (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2009). CALL is not only used to test SLA hypotheses (e.g., the roles of input, interaction, output, socio-cultural theory, etc.), but it also stands alone as a new strand of pedagogical research as it looks into what kind of conditions and contexts are simulated by computers favorable to language learning. These conditions and contexts are usually hard to create using traditional teaching resources (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2009, 549-551).

In sum, CALL and computer-aided SLA research have gradually taken a more central role, although technology is yet to bring an overhaul to the fundamentals of language teaching, learning, and research.

REFERENCES

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Shaoyan Qi is a doctoral student in the Applied Linguistics Program at Teachers College, Columbia University. Her research interests include instructed SLA, and more specifically, task-based language teaching and learning. She is currently a Chinese language lecturer at the East Asian Languages and Cultures Department of Columbia University.