

Please cite as:

Shrestha, Prithvi N. (in press). Innovations in Learning Technologies for English Language Teaching, G. Motteram (Ed.). British Council, London (2013). *System*(0). doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2013.12.016>

## Book review

*Innovations in Learning Technologies for English Language Teaching*, Gary Motteram (Ed.). British Council, London (2013). Pp. 197

Language teaching and learning has undergone tremendous changes in the last forty years. These changes were influenced by not only changing views of language teaching and learning but also changes occurring in general education and global advancement. Another significant player is information and communications technologies (ICTs) which have brought about innovative changes both in general education (Laurillard, 2012) and language teaching (Chapelle, 2010), including English language teaching (ELT). This field has established itself as Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). Given the ubiquitous presence of ICTs globally, their use in English language education contexts has significantly increased (Chik, 2013). In this context, Gary Motteram's edited volume *Innovations in Learning Technologies for English Language Teaching* is not only timely but also an invaluable addition to the field.

This volume contains an introduction and seven chapters. While Chapters 1 and 2 deal with teaching English to young learners (primary and secondary schools), Chapter 3, 4 and 5 relate to older learners, albeit focusing on specific areas such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Chapter 6 discusses the use of technology in English language assessment and Chapter 7 theorises CALL by extending the current thinking in the field. I review each chapter in the order they appear and then make general comments on the volume in terms of its strengths and weaknesses.

The volume begins with an introduction by the editor (Motteram). As expected, this introductory chapter introduces the reader to the volume. At first, it discusses the concept of CALL and the suitability of this term in light of recent developments in digital technologies and their use in education (e.g., see Beetham & Sharpe, 2013; Blake, 2013). Motteram convincingly argues in the chapter that CALL is appropriate to use as it is 'still the most common referent' in the field (p. 5). The chapter, then, presents a historical synopsis of CALL and how it has diversified recently. Nevertheless, as Motteram contends, the CALL literature lacks real ELT CALL practitioner 'stories' that this volume brings together. This chapter also usefully summarises the type of case studies used in each chapter and what each chapter focuses on.

Chapter 1 (Pim) and Chapter 2 (Stanley) deal with how emerging technologies are used in English language teaching in primary and secondary schools in

different parts of the world respectively. In Chapter 1, Pim gives us an overview of the current global ELT developments such as governments in non-English speaking countries introducing English language very early in primary schools due to the global importance of the language. Then he presents a large number of case studies (i.e., nine) to illustrate how a range of new emerging technologies such as video conferencing and talking book have been effectively used by classroom teachers around the world. Stanley's chapter takes us through current ELT practices in light of technology use in secondary schools. Like Pim, he demonstrates through case studies how ordinary English language teachers have found ways of exploiting a range of new technologies in their classroom effectively. Interestingly, all the case studies in these two chapters seem to come from developed or semi-developed countries such as Japan and Turkey. Both do not mention probably the biggest mobile technology driven ELT project called [English in Action](#) in Bangladesh (e.g., see Shohel & Power, 2010 ; Walsh, Shrestha, & Hedges, 2013 ).

Slaouti, Onat-Stelma and Motteram discuss the use of technologies in adult English language learn settings through three case studies (UK, Slovenia and the Czech Republic) in Chapter 3. The authors use these case studies to reflect on the nature of adult language learners, using technologies (internet tools such as wikis) with them and theorizing English language learning. Convincingly, they take a sociocultural view of language learning to examine the adult English language learning contexts used in the chapter. One minor weakness of this chapter is that the readers unfamiliar with the language proficiency levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CoE, 2001) may find it difficult to understand what each level means.

Chapter 4 (Kern) deals with how technologies have been used in the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) area. The author starts the chapter by defining what ESP means and then presents the defining characteristics of ESP followed by a history of the use of technologies in ESP. There are three case studies (Germany, Uruguay and Taiwan) illustrating the use of technologies (Skype, virtual conferencing tools, blogs, discussion groups, etc.) in one of these ESP areas: English for politicians, Business English and English for advertising. While the first two are located in professional settings, the third one takes place in a study context. The author discusses how technological tools contribute to learner autonomy and creating authentic materials. The author concludes that technologies in ESP 'simulate real life work situations, while giving students the opportunity to acquire and practice essential 21<sup>st</sup> century professional skills.' (p. 112)

In Chapter 5, Gilbert examines how technologies are being used in English for Academic Purposes (EAP), a branch of ESP (p. 119). The author describes the nature of EAP and where it is traditionally offered (i.e., higher education institutions in English speaking countries). Then three case studies (two Canadian and one German) are presented to illustrate how concordancing, wiki and a learning management system are used by EAP teachers to support their learners. These case studies are discussed in the light of the EAP learner needs in their associated contexts. The author credibly argues that these technological

tools contribute positively to teaching and learning EAP if they are integrated from that start rather than as an add-on later (p. 140). Given the increasing need for EAP learners to rely on digitally mediated content for their disciplinary areas, a judicious use of technologies is essential for them.

While other chapters focus on teaching and learning, Chapter 6 (Stannard & Basiel) contributes to the debate on the use of technologies in English language assessment. In this chapter, the authors discuss the changing landscape of educational assessment and its subsequent effects on language assessment in the last 50 years. They, however, focus on practice-based English language assessment (teacher assessment) rather than large-scale tests such as TOEFL. The authors helpfully define a number of key terms used in language assessment. Among them the key ones include assessment, learning cycle, washback, peer evaluation, and language portfolio. There are six case studies (Peru, Turkey, Tunisia and UK) demonstrating how various technological tools, particularly internet-based ones, have been used by English language teachers including the authors. Among these tools, [VoiceThread](#) and [myBrainShark](#) appear to be useful for oral assessment given their multiple functionality (e.g., audio feedback, video attachment, etc.). The authors provide a helpful list of tools and their functions in language assessment on p. 162 – 164. One minor inconsistency in this chapter I noticed was the use of 'I' to refer to one author and the first name (Russell) to another in Case Study 6.4 and 6.5.

The concluding chapter by the editor of this volume (Motteram) brings together the threads developed across the previous six chapters in terms of how educational technologies have been used by practising English language teachers, often to meet their contextual needs. This chapter, as the title suggests, extends the conceptual frameworks or theories underpinning educational technologies for ELT. Motteram persuasively theorises English language learning and educational technologies by using the lens of activity theory as developed by Engeström (e.g., see Engeström, 2008). He presents CALL and ELT as two activity systems interacting with each other where teachers and learners acting as agents deploy technologies. While theorizing the field, he contends that educational technologies should not be seen as going through various historical phases. Instead, he cogently argues that they should be considered sociocultural artefacts which mediate our ELT classroom practices. Motteram concludes that the field of language learning is not only 'enhanced, but is also being changed by the ways that technology is used by creative language teachers in the many different classrooms throughout the world' (p. 188).

In summary, this edited volume by Motteram is well-presented and each chapter functions effectively as part of the whole. It is timely given the increasingly significant role played by educational technologies in ELT. This publication makes a substantial contribution to the field. As far as I am aware, it is the first publication of its kind, covering such a broad range of topics and yet, it is full of practical ideas for English language teachers working in different contexts. The most powerful aspect of this volume is perhaps the use of case studies which not

only engage readers but also inspire them. The book is freely available [online](#) (thanks to the British Council) which makes it easily accessible by practising teachers from all over the world. The only shortcoming of this book is possibly the majority of the case studies coming from Europe and the Americas, which may have been due to the individual authors' unavoidable circumstances. I have no hesitation to recommend this book to English language teachers, researchers, institutional heads and policy-makers in the field.

### References

- Beetham, Helen, & Sharpe, Rhona (Eds.). (2013). *Rethinking pedagogy for a digital age : designing for 21st century learning* (Second ed.). New York and London: Routledge.
- Blake, Robert J. (2013). *Brave new digital classroom : technology and foreign language learning* (Second ed.). Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.
- Chapelle, Carol A. (2010). The spread of computer-assisted language learning. *Language Teaching*, 43(01), 66-74. doi: doi:10.1017/S0261444809005850
- Chik, Alice. (2013). Naturalistic CALL and Digital Gaming. *TESOL Quarterly*, 47(4), 834-839. doi: 10.1002/tesq.133
- CoE. (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching and assessment*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
- Engeström, Yrjö. (2008). Enriching activity theory without shortcuts. *Interacting with Computers*, 20(2), 256-259.
- Laurillard, Diana. (2012). *Teaching as a design science : building pedagogical patterns for learning and technology*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Shohel, M. Mahruf C., & Power, Tom. (2010). Introducing mobile technology for enhancing teaching and learning in Bangladesh: teacher perspectives. *Open Learning*, 25(3), 201-215. doi: 10.1080/02680513.2010.511953
- Walsh, Christopher S., Shrestha, Prithvi , & Hedges, Claire. (2013). Mobile phones for professional development and English teaching in Bangladesh. *International Journal of Innovation and Learning*, 13(2), 183-200.

Dr. Prithvi N. Shrestha  
Department of Languages, Faculty of Education and Language Studies, The Open  
University, Milton Keynes MK7 7SY, United Kingdom  
Email address: [Prithvi.Shrestha@open.ac.uk](mailto:Prithvi.Shrestha@open.ac.uk)