

[Review]**Beatty, Ken (2003). *Teaching and Researching Computer-Assisted Language Learning*, Pearson Education**

Jim Ranalli (jim.ranalli@gmail.com)
Iowa State University, U.S.A.

In the opening chapter, Ken Beatty compares his book to a map used by early explorers. His hope, he says, is to provide readers with a guide to the terra incognita that constitutes CALL, which is still a relatively new and constantly changing field. The book, published as part of Pearson Education's Applied Linguistics in Action Series, has the stated aim of providing a current, critical, and accessible-yet-authoritative account of developments in the field that will be relevant to both practitioners and researchers, which is important, according to Beatty, since "increasingly c they are the same people" (2003, p. 1).

Beatty argues that, in addition to suffering from fragmentation and a lack of scientific rigor, CALL too often goes uninfluenced by applied linguistics, and this work is, therefore, an attempted remedy. Readers will be left with no doubt that the author is well acquainted with current scholarship, evidenced, for example, by the abundance of pertinent quotes from relevant authorities on the various topics under discussion that are to be found sprinkled liberally throughout. But readers may also be forgiven the impression that, in contrast to other writers on CALL who go light on theory and heavy on technology, Beatty appears in some cases to err in the opposite direction. Particularly in the later chapters, the discussion can be overly general and abstract, with precious few real-world examples or other attempts to link theory to practice.

Beatty divides the book into three main sections. Section 1, dealing with key concepts, examines various definitions of CALL and includes explanations of and elaboration on important related ideas. It also attempts to provide a historical perspective on the field, including the observation that too much time in CALL has been spent reinventing the wheel. Section II builds on these ideas and deals with CALL's place in teaching and research, showing how the discipline has been integrated into the design of curricula, materials, and assessment (with particular focus on computer-adaptive testing), while also highlighting gaps in research. Section III goes deeper into CALL-related research, examining current trends via a survey of 145 articles published in the field, and discussing a range of issues identified as important by different researchers. It also highlights examples of different types of CALL research in terms of context, aims, procedure, and evaluation. A fourth section at the end, titled Resources, provides links, a glossary, and other 'tools' for learning more about CALL and conducting research.

In Chapter 1, Beatty briefly discusses the emergence of CALL, contrasts various definitions of the term, and relates how it has come to encompass materials design, technologies, pedagogical theories, and modes of instruction. There are examples of how computers are used inside and outside the classroom, consideration of the scope of CALL, and connections drawn to the field of learner autonomy. Beatty also mentions the

important shift in the research focuses; no longer are we asking whether to use computers for language instruction but rather how and for what purposes. The lack of empirical research is also highlighted.

The history of CALL is plotted in more detail in the second chapter, laid out against the theme of behaviorist versus constructivist approaches to language learning. Readers are taken from the large-scale, publicly funded research projects of the 1950s and 60s, including PLATO at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, to the 1970s and innovations in the use of micro and mini computers at Brigham Young University, to the advent of multimedia in the 1990s and still later the Internet. Beatty highlights key developments in software and hardware, as well as the increase in teacher-led research resulting from the emergence of the PC for individual use while arguing that much of CALL nevertheless remains stuck in a "behaviorist rut" (2003, p.36).

Chapter 3 is devoted to hypertext, hypermedia, and multimedia, starting with a long (some might say overly so) discussion of the differences between these terms. Beatty then relates their implications, namely the emergence of an alternative to the linearity of paper-based texts, and the links to constructivism that this innovation makes possible. He traces the antecedents of hypertext (including early mentions in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*), noting its applications for both general education and language learning, and closes the chapter with a description of Hoogeveen's (1995) analysis of the potential of multimedia to enhance learning through stimulation, involvement, "congruence," and strong recognition effects.

Chapter 4 then gets to the heart of the matter, illustrating some of the concepts and terms discussed thus far via descriptions of eight different types of CALL application, including word processors, games, analytical tools from the field of corpus linguistics, the Internet, and handheld devices like PDAs. The chapter makes plain the broad scope and diversity of CALL and raises important questions about the costs and benefits of using complex technology to teach language.

Chapters 5 and 6 deal with second language acquisition and collaboration/negotiation of meaning respectively, examining the challenges facing CALL designers and practitioners who try to apply theory to practice. A fair amount of background discussion is devoted to behaviorist versus constructivist approaches to language learning, as well as the notion of collaboration and how it differs from similar concepts such as cooperation, teamwork, and interdependence. Both of these chapters are thick with theory and thin on practical examples, case studies, or other methods of illustration; thus it is here that Beatty seems least interested in describing the relevant technology.

Chapters 7 and 8 are also quite abstract, dealing in turn with the need to define a model for CALL, and with theoretical and pedagogical concerns. The former wrestles with questions such as whether to conceive of CALL as supplementary to classroom instruction or as an autonomous process and how to deal with the field's potential vastness. The latter considers issues such as addressing different learning styles in CALL, how to make the best use of commercial software designed not by language educators but programmers. It also addresses the threats posed by, among other things, viruses, copyright infringement, and pornography. Again, examples and concrete illustrations are in short supply, and the discussion has a perfunctory tone. Indeed, the whole issue of software evaluation is dealt with in a single page, while platitudes are much in evidence; for example: "c if teachers and schools are to influence the creation of materials they

purchase and use these materials effectively, it is necessary to study the issues in creating and using them" (2003, p. 160).

The final two chapters address research. Chapter 9 looks into current topics of interest in CALL-related research via a survey of 145 articles from a number of peer-reviewed publications in the field of language teaching. One important theme that emerges is that studies comparing CALL performance to classroom teaching have given way to research that considers CALL on its own merits. A significant amount of discussion is also devoted to action research, in line with Beatty's desire to blur the line between teachers and researchers. While this chapter also suffers from the ubiquitous scarcity of practical illustration, the final one goes some way toward redeeming the book. The author uses Chapter 10 to describe eight different approaches to CALL-related research, including corpus linguistics methods, error analysis, case studies, and ethnography. Although there is space enough here to only just broach each approach, Beatty does provide sufficient aims, procedures, and evaluation guidelines to get interested readers started.

The resources section at the end contains a brief glossary of essential terms, as well as a directory to professional associations, journals, newsletters, research guides, email lists and websites for readers wishing to explore CALL further. Like other parts of the book, the selection here seems somewhat arbitrary and incomplete. For example, a journal many would identify as the preeminent refereed publication in the field of CALL, *Language Learning & Technology*, is not mentioned, although it has been published since 1997.

This is not to suggest that *Teaching and Researching Computer-Assisted Language Learning* is without its strengths. Beatty's writing style is concise, clear, and largely jargon-free; the book is attractively laid out, with sidebar-like boxes on nearly every page containing well-chosen quotes or explanations of important concepts. It also, as mentioned, benefits from having an author who is well acquainted with SLA theory and mainstream pedagogy. However, readers will probably not find this book alone sufficient for an introduction to the field because of the shortage of examples of real-life CALL in practice. While the author's goal may have been to blur the lines between teacher and researcher, his efforts to unblur the topic of CALL for the uninitiated are not entirely successful.

References

- Beatty, K. (2003). *Teaching and Researching Computer-Assisted Language Learning*. London, Pearson Education.
- Hoogeveen, M. (1995). "Towards a new multimedia paradigm: is multimedia assisted instruction really effective?" *Ed-MEDIA* 95.