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Reviews

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REVIEWS

Lyn Pemberton and Simon Shurville (eds), 2000, *Words on the Web: Computer Mediated Communication.* Exeter/Portland: Intellect. ISBN 1-871516-56-0. i–iv and 124 pages. Price not known, paperback.

The papers in this collection are mostly taken from symposia on computer-mediated communication (CMC) and sociolinguistics held in Cardiff and Brighton in 1997; a number of the papers were specially commissioned. The volume aims to cover a wide range of approaches and methodologies as they are being applied to the use of new computer-based media in linguistic communication. The editors divide the contributions very broadly into 'structures' and 'behaviour', with the former encompassing issues of Web design and use of resources and the latter focusing more specifically on sociolinguistic aspects.

Jaime Henriquez begins the first section by reviewing the effects of web links on writing and reading and suggesting pointers for good Web design. Since links are instant and uni-directional, they can deprive the reader of helpful context, especially if they are generated from full text searches by search engines beyond the control of the writer. Readers' disorientation may also be reinforced by the way in which a browser uses a palimpset (full screen) display, thereby erasing the previous page, and by the generic nature of the link itself, which simply moves from one page to another without providing any connecting information. To avoid readers feeling that they are plunging straight into a Web page whose context they do not fully understand and from which they cannot retrace their steps, it is argued that authors should provide explicit orientational and contextual information on each page. From a more theoretical perspective, Bernard Scott looks at how models of conversation, knowledge structure and forms of expository narrative may inform future strategies of Web design. Despite the abstract nature of the approach, we may look forward to its providing future material delicacies, if only because of the tantalizing photograph of a doughnut entitled 'a globally cyclic entailment mesh represented as a torus'.

Mindful of how important link labels (anchor points) are to readers if they are not to feel lost in unstructured hyperspace, Einat Amitay analyzes the content of such labels in a corpus of 155 personal home pages. While no particular relation emerges between the length of the text and the number of words used as anchors, home pages reveal fairly consistent linguistic features: these include the use of informal and direct language, a preponderance of present-tense verb forms, few connectives or negatives, and directional instructions (such as 'click here') designed to control the reader's movement through the text. Definite and indefinite articles in link labels are also employed, among other things, to indicate differences between new and old (i.e., already known) information. Amitay concludes that hypertexts are far from randomly constructed: authors adopt a range of pragmatic linguistic devices to locate their text in a particular space and to help readers navigate their way through it.

The explosion of e-mail communication has stimulated enormous academic interest in the relationship between language and the new medium. After studying e-mails from a number of academic discussion lists, Helmut Gruber addresses the question of whether these provide evidence for recognizing a separate genre of 'scholarly e-mail postings'. He concludes that, while they share

certain general linguistic features, they also display differences characteristic of sub-genres. These depend partly on the nature of each list and its communicative goals; for instance, whether messages are exchanged between insiders or are intended for reading by a wider audience.

Addressing the relationship between multilingualism and new communication technologies, Pirkko Raudaskoski reports on the results of a case study of an Internet-based desktop videoconferencing facility. The CU-SeeMe system linked two remote groups of students, one in Finland, one in Sweden, in a series of seminars using English as the link language. The study focuses on how participants use and respond to text that is typed on the speaker's video image. Robert Fouser et al. consider how the alphabet systems of different languages (English, Japanese and Korean) and the keyboard inputting methods associated with them affect and constrain the representation of oral and expressive features in on-line communication (in this case, chatrooms and newsgroups). The authors distinguish semasiographic, logographic and phonographic techniques for encoding orality and show how users apply them in their language. They also point out how standard conventions for expressive language are beginning to emerge in English.

In the second section, a contribution by Zazie Todd and Stephanie Walker observes how students employ Internet chat-sites (so-called 'talkers') as an aid to informal foreign language practice. The study surveyed the natural occurrence of multilingualism on chat-sites, gathered participants' views on their usage of a language while logged on to a site, and looked at attitudes to the creation of separate language 'rooms' for a particular site. Sandra Harrison considers how politeness strategies can contribute to the successful function of an e-mail discussion group.

Heather Matthews examines dialogues that were conducted in two types of on-line conferencing fora, one for computer professionals, another for New Age enthusiasts. She finds that, while both groups use the medium extensively for casual conversation, the IT forum contains more externally focused transactions and the New Age group more emotionally based interactions. Interestingly, the New Age group's perceived communication needs more closely match actual performance. The study raises various issues, such as the influence of subject matter and gender on dialogue, and whether computer conferencing can satisfy users' needs alone or needs to be supplemented by additional communication channels. Taking a specific subject domain for her study, Sonja Launspach describes the difficulties on-line participants experienced in establishing the meaning of 'raunchy' in the context of a discussion about American sacred harp music. The problems seemed to lie in establishing a mutual cognitive environment and agreeing on the boundary between literal and metaphoric use of the word.

Jacqueline Taylor reviews research on the effects of CMC and group communication and interpersonal perception, in particular in terms of flaming, self-disclosure and balance of participation. In her own study, which aimed to provide more empirical data based on real-life communication in working environments, she finds that subjects who know more about each other communicate more readily, although anonymity encourages more balanced levels of participation. More research is required to determine whether computer-mediated group interaction functions in the same way as in face-to-face situations. Finally, Luís Pérez-González reports on the implications of a corpus-based study of the use of electronic mediation for processing emergency calls from members of the public. Such systems typically rely on a human operator converting information from callers into standard fields or codes that are forwarded to the appropriate emergency service. After analyzing the linguistic interactions between caller and operator, he concludes that, while electronic data-entry forms need to be more flexible in order

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for communication to function smoothly and efficiently, CMC helps the call-taker to distinguish between genuine and hoax calls, since malicious callers tend to deviate from institutionally favoured paths of interaction.

Although relatively few contributions specifically address issues of language learning and multilingualism, the collection offers the reader valuable insights into how on-line technologies are shaping linguistic discourse.

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Shapiro, J. and Rich, R. (1999) *Facing Learning Disabilities in the Adult Years*. New York: Oxford University Press. 216pp. (hbk). ISBN No. 0 19 511335 7. US$25.

The particular challenges facing adults with learning disabilities constitute a relatively neglected focus both in terms of published sources and also policy and provision. My own work is within higher education and it is only quite recently that appropriate attention has been given to this group of learners. Consequently the opportunity to read and review this new book was most welcome.

In summary, the book comprises fifteen chapters including introduction and conclusion. There is also an interesting and important series of appendices—of which more later. The chapters follow a logical sequence, starting with the aetiology of learning disabilities generally, then consideration of some more specific types of learning disabilities, and moving on to look at their potential impact on individuals in a number of social settings

Looking now in a little more detail at the chapters, the book begins with a recognition that defining learning disabilities is not easy and that there are various possibilities from which to choose. The chapters on the causes of learning disabilities and on diagnosing needs are placed very firmly within the individual/medical model of disability, an approach which some readers may dislike. In moving to explore specific kinds of learning disabilities, Chapter Six is about dyslexia. This makes good use of the case history of Sharon, who has what might be regarded as the classic difficulties with spelling, reading and writing. Towards the close of this chapter, some strategies for supporting people with dyslexia are suggested but, interestingly, nothing is said about scotopic sensitivity syndrome and the use of coloured overlays to aid reading. The next chapter looks in more detail at difficulties encountered in reading, writing and mathematics using two further case histories. Chapter Eight discusses Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) and contains an interesting short discussion on the use of medication to try to control behaviour.

Looking at behaviour forms a neat link with the next series of chapters, which consider a number of social contexts, starting with education. When discussing reading and writing, the authors make a useful distinction between skills and strategies. In my view, this chapter has a much greater practical focus than those which have preceded it. Having outlined my own interest in higher education, it will come as no surprise when I say that the following chapter, which is on higher education, is of special interest to me. Whilst based on the United States of

America's experience, it is informative to see parallels with what has happened in Europe, most notably the increase in the number of people willing to declare that they have a learning disability. Given its American focus, this chapter also explores the important legal context which higher education institutions have to recognize, especially the requirement to make 'reasonable accommodations'. There is also some acknowledgement of the process of transition into higher education. Logically, the following chapter is about employment and again there are sections outlining the legal position, for example with reference to the Americans with Disabilities Act 1990. Questions about what to disclose and when are examined prior to moving on to consider vocational rehabilitation in the following chapter. Prior to concluding, there is a chapter claiming to look at the case histories of eight individuals, although sadly there are only seven, rather an unfortunate error. However, what is of interest is that, of the seven, three people are employed in medicine and professions allied to it, and three work as teachers. From a UK perspective this is fascinating, since entry to these professions on this side of the Atlantic is a problem for people with learning difficulties.

The book also contains an interesting and useful series of appendices. These cover lists of tests for use with adults, relevant journals, professional organizations and agencies working to support people with learning disabilities, and a guide for college planning. To me, the glossary of terms was very helpful, although the most valuable appendix was that which summarizes current American legislation on discrimination and some significant legal judgements involving people with learning disabilities.

Having provided an outline of the content, what then are my reflections? I think that, for those coming new to working with people with learning disabilities in countries outside the United States, it could provide a useful broadening of knowledge. It is easy to read and the frequent use of individual case histories helps give meaning to the more general assertions. However, to return to a point made earlier, some caution needs to be exercised, since the approach adopted is markedly based on an individual/deficit/medical model of learning disabilities. In my view, the book should offer greater coverage of the social/educational/political model. With this caveat, I can recommend the book as a worthwhile addition to the collection of useful sources relevant to understanding the lives of adults with learning disabilities.

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Paul Lewis (ed.), 1998, *Teachers, Learners, and Computers: Exploring Relationships in CALL*. Nagoya: The Japan Association for Language Teaching.

This is an anthology of 25 wide-ranging articles by various authors. Paul Lewis, the editor, teaches English and Multimedia Studies at Aichi Shukutoku Junior College, in Nagoya, Japan, and is assistant editor of *The Language Teacher,* the monthly publication of the Japan Association for Language Teaching. Many of the those who have contributed to this volume are also based in Japan. The book, primarily intended for teachers, sets out to explore the deepening

relationship between language teachers, learners and computers. This is achieved by bringing together contributions from leading experts and teachers currently involved in CALL.

The 25 papers have been grouped, according to their relationships in CALL, under the three sections mentioned in the title: 'Teachers', 'Learners' and 'Computers'. The teacher in the CALL classroom is the focus of the seven papers that comprise the first of these sections and they deal with teacher education, teacher roles, English for Specific Purposes, curriculum issues, and the teaching of writing, concluding with a reflective essay concerning the views of one teacher whose experience of CALL had been negative. The second section, 'Learners', discusses the uses of e-mail, on-line chat, MOOs and learner dictionaries. Learners are also considered from the perspective of Multiple Intelligence Theory. In addition, there are papers on learner aptitude and comfort level prior to computer use and on the way in which investigation of a learner corpus can be used to contribute to material design. The final section considers the role of the computer in language teaching, with a discussion of the use of the computer as a tool for writing and producing concordances. There is a list of free net resources and the issue of CALL centre design is also addressed. In addition to a historical perspective on technology and language teaching in Japan, there are predictions regarding the future development of CALL and the potential role of speech recognition and artificial intelligence.

This exploration of CALL via its relationships with teachers, learners and computers recalls previous CALL taxonomies: Taylor's (1980) 'tutor, tool, tutee'; Jones and Fortescue's (1987) 'stimulus', 'workhorse' and 'knower-of-the-right-answer'; Wyatt's (1987) 'instructional, collaborative and facilitative'; Higgins' (1988) 'magister and pedagogue'; Levy's (1997) 'tutor-tool framework'.

In spite of its stated theme of 'Teachers, Learners, and Computers', this book contains a rather mixed bag of articles on CALL. Nevertheless, these articles are interesting and well written, providing as they do a mixture of anecdotal accounts, action research and more structured research-driven papers. A number of implications for future research and development arise. Firstly, there is a need to determine the full extent to which technology is used in adult ESL, how language learning has been transformed by computer-based technology and what cultural impact the introduction of technology has on individual societies. Then we should ask how students with differing levels of technological skill can be catered for. We have also to address the issue of more student-friendly environments, so that, for example, students do not 'lose' the window that they are working in, the browser does not crash upon entering a certain page, or the Internet connection is simply too slow. CMC has its own inherent problems and creates additional work for the teacher. The issue of how to address grammar in the use of chatlines needs to be explored. There is a need for co-operation between experts in CALL and ESP in educational design. Ways to integrate CALL with holistic language-teaching methods such as Multiple Intelligence Theory could be investigated. In the case of electronic learners' dictionaries, improvement in exercises is badly needed, to cover all information types and offer complete training in dictionary use. Learner corpora are still a new area for research and much remains to be discovered in this field. Chatterbox programs, such as ELIZA, might be improved in a number of ways so that they might correct student errors, or include speech recognition and production, or possess some world knowledge. Finally, developments in speech recognition open up new possibilities for future research and development.

Many teachers who work with CALL will draw inspiration from this book.

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