

Editorial

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EUROCALL returned to Valencia in 2009, for the first time since 1995. Some of the more senior members of EUROCALL will recall the conference which took place in September that year, hosted by the Department of Modern Languages. Although e-mail was only slowly emerging at the time, EUROCALL '95 was one of the first conferences in Spain to digitise and publish the abstracts of all the presentations on the web; an emerging World Wide Web that seemed revolutionary at the time. For anybody who might be nostalgic, the 1995 abstracts can still be accessed at <http://eurocall.webs.upv.es/euro95/home.htm>. The proceedings of the 1995 conference are also a valuable witness of what was prominent at the time in relation to CALL and TELL. Looking back we can see that some of the concerns in the mid nineties are still valid today, for example, issues such as integrating CALL into the language curriculum, incorporating speech recognition tools into language courseware, parser analysers, interactive learning environments and so forth.

EUROCALL 2009 was also hosted by the Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, but on this occasion at its Gandia campus site. The Gandia campus is located in one of the most privileged Valencian regions known as “La Safor” where the Mediterranean Sea and a historical agricultural tradition meet. Well known for its wide golden beaches, Gandia is historically renowned, among other things, for its 14th Century Palacio Ducal, home to the Borgia family.

The 2009 EUROCALL conference focused on *New Trends in Computer Assisted Language Learning* with a special emphasis on innovative ways of collaborating and working together in the advancement of language learning and teaching. The conference sub-themes demonstrated the numerous branches that have grown out of the CALL tree and were an illustration, we believe, of the roots that this discipline has planted in a collective will to actively contribute towards better understanding and improving language learning with the assistance of information and communications technologies. CALL researchers, developers and practitioners delivered a total of 130 presentations relating to 18 subthemes that summarise current interests and concerns in computer assisted language learning. The presentations took the form of research, research & development, and reflective practice papers, in addition to seven pre-conference workshops and over twenty poster presentations.

It is clearly significant that there were 60 EUROCALL 2009 papers dealing with pedagogical change in technology integration. This implies that, still today, one of the major concerns in CALL is its pedagogical aspect, i.e. trying to find innovative solutions to support the progress of pedagogy and its implications on teaching methodology. Other chief concerns, in view of the number of papers presented in

relation to these topics, are research in new language learning environments (61) and innovative e-learning solutions for languages (56). These learning environments and e-learning solutions naturally refer to a large scope of languages, target groups and situations ranging from the more “traditional” online environments, such as Moodle or other such Learning Management Systems, to the more sophisticated virtual world environments such as Second Life. In relation to this, three strands stood out as rapidly emerging areas: Virtual Worlds, Mobile Learning and CALL supported Content Integrated Language Learning (CLIL). Regarding the first, as mentioned above, most of the papers dealt with creating appropriate pedagogical frameworks geared towards different language learning target groups and needs; the second focused both on mobile devices and student mobility as a means of creating new ubiquitous learning scenarios. The third area, CLIL, focused on studies whereby a specific subject matter is taught through a foreign language, a practice which is rapidly emerging in Europe and Asia, two continents where language education has traditionally been linked to the teaching of languages for academic and specific purposes.

Recurring topics present at EUROCALL 2009 and at prior conferences for the past few years include curriculum development for CALL; assessment, testing, feedback and guidance in CALL; new developments in courseware design; and, last but not least, computer mediated communication. Again, the common core in all of these papers was to explore new means of delivering pedagogically sound ways of providing learners with media-rich environments to enhance their learning experience, improve language acquisition and offer key issues to promote lifelong language learning.

Regarding lifelong learning, approximately one third of the Gandia conference presentations dealt with projects that had been funded by the European Commission’s Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), the Agency that manages the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP), one of the Commission’s major contributions towards ensuring linguistic diversity and multilingualism within European Union Member States. In this respect the conference organiser was awarded funding under Key Activity 2 – Languages to initiate the EURODIS project; a project aiming to set up a network devoted to sharing experience, promoting examples of good practice and advice on particularly important issues such as dissemination opportunities, evaluation models, etc. in CALL, as well as creating a web-enhanced searchable database including the EU-funded projects presented year after year at EUROCALL conferences.

The EUROCALL Virtual Strand became a truly integral part of the conference this year and generated a great deal of activity; in addition to all the plenary sessions being broadcast live by streaming video on the Internet, there were 7 online papers delivered by colleagues in remote areas of the world, as well as a very active blog and a real-time Twitter account of conference activities. This initiative honoured the conference theme, “New trends in CALL: working together”; it became obvious that “cloud computing” was a new trend in computer assisted learning, whether or not focussed on language learning. According to Wikipedia – the quintessential example of collaborative writing – cloud computing is “a paradigm shift whereby details are abstracted from the users who no longer need knowledge of, expertise in, or control

over the technology infrastructure “in the cloud” that supports them. Cloud computing describes a new supplement, consumption and delivery model for IT services based on Internet, and it typically involves the provision of dynamically scalable and often virtualized resources as a service over the Internet”. These services provide an invaluable opportunity for collaboration both for students and their instructors, a fact that was present in many of the conference presentations. The word “collaborative” was present in the title of 10 of the papers relating, fundamentally, to two concepts, i.e. “learner autonomy” and “writing skills”. A clear illustration of this are two of the papers selected for publication in this issue; namely, Phil Murphy’s view on the effects of computer-mediated feedback and interaction via computer-mediated communication in web-based collaborative reading exercises for learners in remote locations, and Marie-Madeleine Kenning’s account of an experiment aimed at exploring collaborative scaffolding in online task-based voice interactions between advanced learners of French.

References

- Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cloud_computing> [Retrieved 08/01/2010].
EUROCALL 2009 conference website <<http://eurocall.webs.upv.es/eurocall2009>>.