

EUROCALL 2000, University of Abertay Dundee, 31.8. – 2.9.2000

Conference report by Mathias Schulze

The European Association for Computer Assisted Language Learning – EUROCALL – was formally established in 1993, but its roots go back as far as 1984. Each year the EUROCALL conference is hosted by a university in a different European country. This year's annual conference took place in Dundee in Scotland with the main theme: *Innovative Language Learning in the Third Millennium*. The conference was complemented by the *History of CALL* exhibition, which was coordinated and compiled by Philippe Delcloque (Abertay Dundee). Philippe and his small team were also the organisers of the main conference.

The conference was preceded by three pre-conference workshops: the two-day InStil Symposium *Integrating Speech Technology in the (Language) Learning and Assistive Interface*, also organised by Philippe Delcloque; the Human Language Technology in CALL workshop, the first workshop of the newly established Special Interest Group in Language Processing, organised by Mathias Schulze (UMIST/Manchester); and the workshop *Doing WELL" - a practical introduction to good practice in exploiting Web Enhanced Language Learning* organised by William Haworth (Liverpool John Moores) on behalf of the WELL project.

Five keynote speeches were delivered in the course of the conference. Stephen Heppell (Ultralab Cambridge) described work that is carried out at his research laboratories and discussed the impact of new technologies (e.g. mobile phones) on learning. Ron Cole (Colorado) described the capabilities of Baldi, an animated conversational agent used in learning and language training applications. This agent relies on sophisticated artificial intelligence technology to create the impression of an intelligent conversation partner. Wendy Mackay (Paris-Sud) gave an overview of multimedia work that has been carried out over the last ten years. Ray Kurzweil (Kurzweil Technologies) provided us with his predictions on the future, for example, he predicted that by 2009 computers will disappear and by 2029 our body cells will be augmented by billions of intelligent robots that are smaller than our blood cells. These predictions are based on the assumption of exponential growth - by plotting past events on a graph and prolonging this graph

exponentially into the future. Carol Chapell (Iowa State) outlined necessary future work in computer-assisted language learning based on research in Second Language Acquisition Theory.

Seven parallel paper or demonstration sessions provided a wealth of material. Robert Fischer (Texas State), Executive Director of CALICO, the US-American CALL organisation, compared three CALL programs with identical learning content, but with varying degrees of learner control in order to establish important variables in instructional design of language learning software. Stephan Gabel (Münster) described an analysis of over-indulgence and under-representation of certain linguistic signs and structures in the interlanguage of German English learners. The corpus was built using text from e-mail conversations of German and American students. Mike Levy and Michael Harrington (Queensland) argued against the notion that CALL can fully be explained in terms of Second Language Acquisition Theory. This overly narrow view needs to be broadened by investigating the role of the computer in L2 learning. Trude Heift (Simon Fraser/Vancouver) described the feedback component of a web-based intelligent tutoring system for German. The learner input is parsed, the parser analysis forms the basis for the feedback on relatively free textual input. The analysis of the logfiles created during a fieldtest with students of German showed that students attended to this specific, contextualised and individualised feedback. Marie-Josée Hamel and Marie-Christine Girard (UMIST/Manchester) described the first phase of a European CALL project – Freetext. This project makes use of a variety of natural language processing (NLP) tools in order to give students of French feedback and help in composition exercises. Challenges for the underlying parsing technology in this project were outlined by Anne Vandeventer (Geneva). Wolfgang Menzel (Hamburg) demonstrated the integration of speech recognition technology in language learning software. Mathias Schulze (UMIST) discussed the issue of feedback in CALL by summarising and relating findings of Learning Psychology, Second Language Acquisition Theory and Human Computer Interface Research. Cornelia Tschichold and Pius Ten Hacken (Neuchatel and Basel) demonstrated *WordManager*, a vocabulary learning tool that will prove useful to learners and teachers of German alike.

Of course, the small selection of papers mentioned here is in no way a true reflection of all the different presentations given during EUROCALL 2000. Selected papers from this conference will be published by Cambridge University Press in *ReCALL* – the EUROCALL journal (vol. 13/1, 2001).

Overall, EUROCALL 2000 was an interesting conference providing participants – CALL researchers and developers as well as interested language teachers from different countries and all sectors of education – with a good overview of current developments and trends in computer-assisted language learning.