

Interview

Computer Assisted Language Learning and Teacher Education: An Interview with Mimi Li

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Abstract

Dr. Mimi Li shares her experiences of research on CALL as well as teacher training focused on digital pedagogy. She also discusses historical developments and existing challenges in teacher education in CALL, and future trends in CALL. Moreover, Dr. Li offers suggestions to teacher educators on program/course developments. In addition, this interview draws readers' attention to the new forum section of LLT "Language Teacher Education and Technology".

Keywords

CALL, digital pedagogy, language teacher education, teacher education in CALL

Dr. Mimi Li is Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics/TESOL in the Department of Literature and Languages at Texas A&M University-Commerce. Her research areas are second language writing and computer assisted language learning. Her work has appeared in peer-refereed journals such as *Journal of Second Language Writing (JSLW)*, *Language Learning & Technology (LLT)*, *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, *Language Teaching*, *Language Teaching Research*, *System*, *Computers & Education*, and *Computers and Composition*. She recently published a monograph entitled "Researching and Teaching Second Language Writing in the Digital Age". She is currently Associate Editor of JSLW and Forum Editor of LLT.

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for the *International Journal of TESOL Studies*. It's genuinely my honor to have this opportunity to talk with you. As you are an expert in the field of CALL, could you first share why you have become so interested in this research area? Do you have any special skills or knowledge about the area of study?

My interest in CALL stemmed from my research assistantship in the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh over a decade ago. Working with a research group consisting of world-renowned scholars and postdoctoral researchers in the Reading and Language lab greatly piqued my interest in research on literacy and technology and spurred me on to pursue a doctoral study. The rigorous Ph.D. training (2009-2014) in the interdisciplinary program Second Language

Acquisition/Instructional Technology at the University of South Florida enabled me to establish a well-grounded research agenda in CALL. This research interest is now fueled by the increasingly important role of technology in language education worldwide.

Could you please share with us your research experience in CALL?

Informed by sociocultural theory and cognitive theory, my research has examined the role of computers and technologies in L2 acquisition, particularly in ESL/EFL writing. I have conducted projects with my collaborators on computer-based collaborative writing, computer-mediated peer response, teacher multimodal feedback, digital multimodal composing, and computer-based vocabulary learning. My research interests are now extended to multimodal pedagogy in language teacher education, as I teach more and more online courses for pre-/in-service language teachers in the US. I am happy to share that my first monograph entitled “Researching and Teaching Second Language Writing in the Digital Age” with Palgrave Macmillan is scheduled to be published in Jan 2022. This book provides up-to-date coverage of the main areas of L2 writing and technology, and aims to guide scholars in undertaking new L2 writing research and instructional practice in technology-supported educational contexts.

We know you serve as the “Language Teacher Education and Technology” forum editor for *Language Learning & Technology*. Why do you think teacher education in CALL is an important topic for language educators? Could you briefly describe, from your perspective, the main developments in teacher education in CALL over the past decade?

Teacher education in CALL has been recognized as an important field since the beginning of the 21st century (Hubbard & Levy, 2006). With the ubiquitous nature of technology in the digital age, the integration of technology into language teaching and learning is gradually becoming a norm. Digital technology is now the essential medium of instruction and will continue to play a significant role in language teaching in the post-pandemic era, but many pre-/in-service teachers still feel underprepared for the digital trend. Pre-/in-service teachers need to receive continuous training on CALL, MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning) and digital pedagogy through both formal and informal education. Thus, the updated CALL-related curriculum, methodology, and assessment are significant for teacher education.

Hubbard and Levy’s (2006) first edited volume entitled “Teacher Education in CALL” brought this important area to the fore. The following special issues (ReCALL 2011 focused on CMC and teacher education, and LLT 2015 on teacher education and CALL) aroused scholars’ wider attention to teacher education and technology. TESOL Technology Standards (2011) further guided language teachers and teacher educators to incorporate technology into curriculum and assessment in and out of classrooms. Nowadays, fueled by the pandemic, the emphasis has been shifting from using technology with pre-/in-service teachers in teacher education courses to preparing (future) language teachers for teaching in distance learning or hybrid/blended learning contexts.

Can you point us to some commonly used frameworks which may help us inquire into teacher education in CALL? What are some challenges as to teacher education in CALL?

There are multiple approaches/frameworks widely used in the teacher education literature, including Technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK), distributed cognition, project-based learning,

situated learning, reflective learning, mentor-based learning, and communities of practice. I want to highlight the role of second language acquisition (e.g., cognition, affect, motivation), and particularly sociocultural theory that examines how pre-/in-service teachers learn, teach, and develop through social interactions with students, technology, colleagues, and administrators in broad sociocultural contexts, from the lens of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), regulation, activity system, and ecological perspective. Regarding the issue of challenges, I would quote Kessler and Hubbard's (2017) work. They addressed four main challenges facing language teachers: (1) preparing teachers for change (e.g., changes in new classroom techniques and course configurations), (2) preparing teachers for interactive materials (e.g., online games and natural language processing techniques), (3) preparing teachers for a social future (e.g., collaborative learning, online community of practice), and (4) normalization (e.g., CALL knowledge and experience). We language educators should try to address these challenges while preparing pre-/in-service language teachers.

Based on your extensive teaching experience in the USA, could you talk about how we should prepare pre-service and in-service teachers as we move forward into the digital era?

Due to the increasingly important role of digital technologies, teacher educators should implement digital multimodal pedagogy in teacher education classes. Here I would like to share my own experience of integrating CALL-related pedagogy and assessment by showing two examples of digital multimodal tasks (Li, 2020). In the General Linguistics class, I replace the midterm exam with the midterm creative multimodal project, in which students draw on a technology tool of their choice to represent and make sense of the linguistic knowledge they have newly learned and indicate how the new knowledge impacts their teaching. In the TESOL Methods course, I implement the task of Multimodal Instructional Materials, in which students create effective instructional resources for ESL/EFL students drawing on selected language teaching methods and principles. Such integrations of CALL assessments have deepened pre-/in-service teachers' content knowledge, motivated learning, and enhanced their creativity and digital literacy skills. Moreover, we should develop an online or blended CALL-focused or online teaching-focused course in the teacher education program. We should also invite students to join various workshops/seminars on language teaching and technology, either face-to-face or virtual, outside the class. In addition, we need to encourage them to take advantage of social networking opportunities, such as EUROCALL and Technology for Language Teaching and Learning on Facebook, and SIGS on other SN apps. In such ways can we develop more technologically competent autonomous language teachers prepared for not only the present but also an unknown technological future.

The pandemic has forced everyone to contemplate the importance of online teaching. However, existing teacher education programs may not include courses to prepare pre-service teachers for effective online teaching. What are your suggestions to teacher educators in relation to course developments?

We definitely encourage teacher education programs to develop courses to prepare language teachers for effective online teaching, such as Teaching Language Online, the one offered in the Applied Linguistics/ TESOL program at my institution. No matter such a course exists or not, teacher educators need to incorporate CALL-related components into their course curricula. They can consider including class activities/assignments such as workshop leading on technology, digital multimodal projects, and webinar participation and reflection. For instance, teacher educators can introduce webinar resources (e.g., Macmillan English Interactive, British Council, Pearson, IALLT) to pre-/in-service language teachers and

require them to attend a live webinar on language teaching and technology and then complete a written reflection as a course assignment. In this way can language teachers continue to engage in professional development through webinars, brushing up their knowledge and skills, so as to be responsive to the changing contexts and changing needs of students.

As a forum section editor for Language Learning & Technology, what would you like the audience to know about your edited section?

This new forum section “Language Teacher Education and Technology” of the renowned free open access journal LLT invites pedagogy-orientated work (preferably 3000-4000 words) reporting innovative practices on teacher education and digital technologies in diverse educational contexts (both formal and informal). It provides a space for teacher educators worldwide who prepare/train language teachers at Pre-K-16 settings to exchange their pedagogical practices in teacher education programs. It is also a space for language teachers to reflect on their own engagement in professional development on computer-based language teaching and learning through different kinds of informal education/training. I am also excited to announce that LLT starts the continuous article publication mode in 2022; that is, the articles are published throughout the year on a rolling basis. If you are interested in contributing, please read the Call for Papers via this link: https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/10125/73420/1/25_01_10125-73420.pdf.

Finally, based on your expertise, what are some important future trends in CALL?

It is hard to define the future directions, but I think CALL will absolutely be a part of language teachers’ and teacher educators’ professional life. Intelligent/smart CALL will be a trend given artificial intelligence growing in capacity and applications. MALL will be a continuing trend with wider accessibility to mobile technology options across the globe. Extended reality/augmented reality, mobile gaming, machine translation, data-driven learning, digital literacies, and translanguaging will remain to be some of the hot topics in the years to come. We will continue to see the switch of “do it yourself” to “do it for me” (Godwin-Jones, 2021) and a more blurred line between learning and recreation.

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