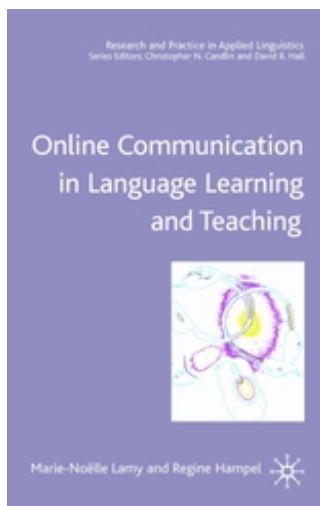


## Book Review

### *Online Communication in Language Teaching and Learning*



**Lamy, Marie-Noëlle & Hampel, Regine (2007)**

***Online Communication in Language Teaching and Learning***

**Series: Research and Practice in Applied Linguistics**

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The main purpose of this book is to examine the theories, pedagogies and tools which contribute to online communication. 'Online' essentially means through the medium of the computer - although there is a very brief section on mobile devices - hence the book's central theme is CMCL. Although it appears constantly, this acronym is never explicitly defined. It is clear, however, that 'CMC' stands for *computer-mediated communication*, while 'L' stands for *language teaching and learning*. To put it another way, as indeed the authors themselves do (p. 112), CMCL can be taken to be what Levy (2000) called 'CMC-based CALL'. In general, this is a book which takes some time to warm up but improves considerably as you get past the first two chapters and into the real meat of CMCL.

Part I, of the four parts the book is divided into, discusses "the major concepts that underpin the field of computer-mediated communication for language learning" (p. 2). Thankfully, both the rather densely-written first chapter (Historical Background) and the somewhat superficial (perhaps necessarily so!) second chapter (Learning Theories) soon give way to concepts the authors write about in a much more interesting way. Chapter 3 (Mediation, Multimodality and Multiliteracies) discusses some of the field's major concepts such as mediation, affordances, multimodal and multiliteracies, while Chapter 4 (Lines of Enquiry into CMCL) examines qualitative and quantitative research methods and contrasts ways in which online discourse and conversation can be analysed. The chapter ends by speculating on ways in which CMCL practioners could research the notions of online interculturalism and identity.

Chapters 5 and 6 look, respectively, at teachers and learners. Chapter 5 explores the roles of the teacher and the skills they need in online settings and goes on to examine the design of socio-collaborative tasks and problem-based learning activities for CALL. Building on the work of Richards and Rodgers (2001) and Hampel (2006), the authors introduce a model for task development applicable to CMCL environments. The chapter ends with some guidelines on how teachers can reflect on their teaching as well as on their use of online teaching tools. The learner is the focus of Chapter 6 (Learner Experience), which discusses aspects such as motivation, anxiety, cognitive load and participation. The final Chapter in Part I (Assessment of CMCL) examines a number of issues in the assessment of online language learning in communicative settings. One

final point to note is that each chapter in Part I concludes with useful suggestions for further reading related to the topic of the chapter from both CMCL and other fields. For each book or article they suggest, Lamy and Hampel give a brief (and much appreciated) summary so that the reader may identify whether the item is of interest or not.

In Part II, Lamy and Hampel provide a literature review in which they examine the relationships between research and practice; that is, how theory has been applied and in what ways empirical findings have fed back into research. Chapters 8-12, therefore, each compare two studies which are based on a specific technology. In order these are: Asynchronous Fora, Synchronous Chat, Multiple Object-oriented Environments, Audiographic Environments and Virtual Worlds, Videoconferencing. In the absence of a sufficient number of published research studies, the final chapter in Part II (Chapter 13, Emerging Technologies) discusses the potential for language learning of blogs, wikis and mobile devices.

Chapters 8-12 follow the same format. Each begins with a brief Introduction to the specific technology, followed by a description of the two studies. For each study, Lamy and Hampel first describe the research frameworks informing the study and then the setting in which the study took place. They then explore some of the insights (positive or negative) gained from practical applications and finally discuss how the findings may feed back into further research and practice. The conclusions which close each of these chapters (as well as the previous sections describing the studies) are brimming with useful ideas for anyone interested in research or increasing the relevance of their teaching.

The four chapters which make up Part III are aimed specifically at readers who wish to carry out small-scale research in communicative environments. Chapter 14 (An Overview of Practitioner Research) uses case studies to identify and demonstrate three broad organising principles for any practitioner research project, and provides an overview of methods and instruments. Chapter 15 (A Practical Guide to CMCL Practitioner Research) looks at some of the human factors to take into account such as technical competence and ethical concerns. Chapter 16 (Dealing with Data in Small-Scale Practitioner Research) discusses some of the practical and methodological requirements involved in collecting and managing data. It suggests a classification of different types of data and introduces some automatic tools which can be used for data analysis. Chapter 17 (Some Possible Practitioner Research Projects) provides templates for six research projects on different aspects of CMCL: videoconferencing, learner identity, collaboration, emerging technologies, teacher training and online tasks. The templates cover aspects such as procedures to follow, the identification of research questions, methodology, data collection and analysis.

Chapter 18 (Resources), the final chapter and Part IV of the book, begins with the words: "This final part offers a list of mainly online resources". However, Lamy and Hampel do not provide a mere list and to call it such does not do it justice. They have organised the resources based on the main function of each site and provide a resources map for ease of reference. Moreover, each item on their 'list' is described in terms of who it is aimed at and why it might be useful.

With this book, Lamy and Hampel provide teachers and researchers with some stimulating approaches to carrying out research as well as ways to develop their practical teaching skills in, and awareness of, online environments. I particularly like the way they build on previous findings to explain the potential uses and challenges of specific technologies for language learning and suggest areas and procedures for research which can be carried out by individuals or small teams.

## References

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