Computer–Assisted Language Learning in East Asia

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, there has been an obvious blooming of the manufacturing of computer hardware and peripherals in Asian countries: to illustrate, Korea, Japan, China, Singapore, and Taiwan. Meanwhile, various information and communications technologies (ICT) and computer games are blossoming among adolescents' entertainment choices that promote their media literacies. Educators have long acknowledged the potential of using ICT to enhance instruction (hereafter referred to as CBL, computer-based learning), and organized conferences and associations to promote academic activities and disseminate updated information about them. In spite of the similar excitement in the East Asian area, at present, there is almost no authoritative scholarly CBL journal available in East Asia. Descriptions of regional academic-conference activities would help the international community understand the development and academic achievements in East Asian areas. The paper is organized with a detailed description about professional associations and conferences of CBL in East Asia with a focus on language learning, followed by the report of a unique project in Taiwan as an example of East Asian cases.

The evolution of professional organizations in Asia is perhaps like that of other areas: from general to specialized interest. To illustrate, early in 1991 an international conference named "Computers in Education/Computer-Assisted Instruction" (ICCE/ICCAI as an Asian chapter of international ICCE)was held in Taiwan, Republic of China (ROC). The domestic conference ICCE (for some years, its taking place was interleaved with the international conference) was held every year until around 1999, and the formal Association of Computer Assisted Instruction was born here.

Academic disciplines keep evolving and become more and more specialized. Among scholars of different subjects, language professionals started to adopt technologies for educational purposes and stimulated

the birth of the area called computer-assisted language learning (CALL). Traced back in history, the first formal organization that was founded to promote the use of computer technologies in the area of (foreign) language instruction is CALICO (Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium) in the USA, dated in early 1980 with a regular publication of *CALICO Journal*. Such an organization was followed by EuroCALL and World CALL. In Asia, the first regional organization may be the Asia-Pacific Association of Multimedia Assisted Language Learning (APAMALL), founded in 2003 (see Crane Publishing, 2003), with a joint conference of multimedia language education in Taiwan (http://www.rocmelia.com.tw). Yet, the development of this organization is still in its infancy, with active involvement of only one organization in Korea and in Taiwan at present. Before APAMALL, formal organizations did not exist except for those in the format of general language conferences in Hong Kong, Japan, Thailand, Singapore, and Taiwan.

As an exemplary case among East Asian countries, Taiwan follows a similar route of specialization. In the area of language studies, the earliest organization related to computer use was the association of ROC Computational Linguistics, founded in 1988, but it had little concern with education until very recently CALL-SIG was developed (which was born in October of 2004). Another line of development that stimulates the birth of CALL in Taiwan is a by-product branching from a general foreign-language teaching association or conference. The largest association in Taiwan is English Teachers' Association (ETA; 1992), with which some early literature and computer workshops were held with its main annual international conference. Later, this workshop (Litcomp) was renamed Language and Technology Conference, which held its fourth year in 2004. Occasionally, some CALL papers appeared in a few ETA conferences. Yet, the real CALL association was not built until 1996, when ROC Multimedia English Language Instruction Association was formally formed

(ROCMELIA), and it has hosted an annual conference since. By 2003, it collaborated with the Korean association to rename itself as APAMALL.

For the general trend in other East Asian countries, Korea has its own multimedia association (Korean Association of Multimedia Assisted Language Learning) that published conference proceedings. The delegate who is interested in a joint Asian association is from Language Education and Technology (LET; started from LLA in 1961, renamed several times with a background in the audio language laboratory), but there is another well-known special-interest group of CALL affiliated with the Japanese Association of Language Teachers (JALT-CALL, started in 1993, CALL JALT SIG). CALL-JALT in Japan confessed on their own home page that they were slow in the exploration of CALL. Hong Kong does not have a regular meeting or an association except for two conferences held by a university (ITMELT). Thailand started its own multimedia language conference quite late, but Singapore does not have a special CALL conference at all except for a general language-teaching conference (by the Regional Language Center). The tradition of English-teaching associations has been quite long in Singapore (annual Seminar of the Regional Language Centre since 1966) and in Japan (annual conference of Japanese Association of Language Teachers since 1975). Most of them have published conference proceedings, anthologies, or online selected papers. This evolution may be similar to other East Asian countries as illustrated in Table 1.

BACKGROUND

Research and development of computer-based systems or learning environments in Taiwan has evolved from the introduction of computers as gadgets to serious

Table 1. CBL institutional evolution in some East Asian countries

East Asian countries	Current association/ regular meeting	Date of a recent event	Previous related association(s)/ (since)	Published (printed) proceedings
Taiwan	ROCMELIA/ APAMALL	2003	ROCLING (1988) ETA (1992), ROCMELIA (1996), Litcomp	YES
Korea	KAMALL/ APAMALL	2003	KAMALL	YES
Japan	LET	unclear	LLA (1961), LET, JALT CALL-SIG	YES
Hong Kong	Information Technology & Multimedia English Language Teaching conference	2003 cancelled due to SARS	1999, 2001, bi-annual	Online papers
Thailand	Multimedia language conference	2003	Unclear	Unclear
Singapore	RELC	2003	RELC (1966)	YES (anthology)

[1] *China: Some of their scholars gave a paper in Hong Kong and Taiwan conferences; but the academic activities in China itself were unable to be documented here (there will be a second Internet English teaching conference to be held in Beijing Foreign Languages University during October 23-24 of 2004, all papers in Chinese, downloaded 3/30/2004). Usually their quality is still a bit behind (based on the limited amount shown in Taiwan's conference proceedings) but it is probably known that they have some extraordinary performance in selected areas such as lexicography or other science disciplines.*
[2] *Hong Kong Polytechnic University: Multimedia language*

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