A Report on EUROCALL 2017

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This report is based on my presence at the 25th annual conference of EUROCALL hosted by the University of Southampton, the UK. I have organized my observation into several sub-headings, beginning with some basic information about the conference, moving on to the plenary speeches, presentations by Japan-based researchers, to information about EUROCALL 2018.

Basic Information about the Conference

The European Association for Computer Assisted Language Learning (EUROCALL), founded in 1993, organizes an international conference annually which brings together researchers, developers, and practitioners interested in using emerging technologies in language learning and teaching. The EUROCALL 2017 was held at the University of Southampton, the UK, on August 23–26 and was attended by delegates from 30 countries around Europe and the world. The theme of the conference was “CALL in a Climate of Change: Adapting to Turbulent Conditions,” which concerned CALL and its connection to the changing global circumstances in economic, political, and environmental spheres. The program included a line-up of over 240 sessions with 3 keynote speeches, many paper presentations organized into 26 parallel sessions, 4 symposia, 8 PhD track presentations (including 2 pecha kucha presentations), 4 EU-funded European project presentations, 14 workshops, and 21 poster presentations. You can find more details by downloading the conference full program at http://www.eurocall2017.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/eurocall_programme_2017_final.pdf and the proceedings at https://research-publishing.net/publication/978-2-490057-04-7.pdf.

Plenary Speeches

There were three plenary speeches at EUROCALL 2017 by the following speakers:
1. “Language, Learning, the Wild, and Rewilding” by Steven Thorne, Portland State University
2. “People Like You Like Presentations Like This” by David Millard, University of Southampton
3. “Looking to Fandom in a Time of Change” by Shannon Sauro, Malmö University

Out of these three, I have chosen to write a short summary of the second speech due its more general relevance to the CALL community worldwide.

David Millard, an associate professor of computer and web science at the University of Southampton, was the second keynote speaker with an eye-catching presentation title which read as “People Like You Like Presentations Like This.” He began his discussion with the basics of web
science and personalization technologies. He then moved on to point out the increasing number of problems such as personal data collection, mass surveillance, and political propaganda, caused by what was originally supposed to benefit humankind. His speech was relevant to anyone whose job involves digital technologies. Although Millard warned the audience about the negative aspects of technology, he equally emphasized the positives and added that we should not give up since there are fortunately certain ways to tackle some of those negatives. I liked his reference to the fact that “[t]he technology that we work on is transformational, we are responsible for its consequences.”

Presentations by Japan-based Researchers
EUROCALL 2017 was well-attended by academics based in Japan. There were 43 presentations (29 oral presentations, 13 poster presentations, and 1 workshop) by researchers and practitioners from various institutes of Higher Education all over Japan on different topics such as the use of learning management systems (LMS), telecollaboration, CALL teacher education, technology-enhanced teaching of language skills and components, online course design, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), learner autonomy, augmented reality, peer feedback and evaluation, data-driven learning, and so on and so forth. Figure 1 is a word cloud created with Word Art (an online word cloud creator, https://wordart.com/) which displays the main keywords appearing in the presentation titles of Japan-based academics. The keywords that appear in a bigger font size have had higher frequencies compared to others. For instance, the word cloud demonstrates that key words such as online and app have recurrently appeared in the presentation titles of researchers in Japan, whereas a keyword like digital story telling seemed to be less trendy.

![Figure 1. Keywords in the titles of presentations by Japan-based academics](image)

Best Poster Presentation Competition
Similar to oral presentations, poster presentations were also categorized as PhD or non-PhD
posters. There were in total 21 posters presented at the conference, and the audience voted for two best posters, one by Megumi Kohyama from the University of Shiga Prefecture (*The Effect of Socio-Economic Status on Informal Mobile-Assisted Language Learning*), and another one by Tanjun Liu, a PhD student at Lancaster University (*Evaluating the Effect of Data-Driven Learning (DDL) on the Acquisition of Academic Collocations by Chinese Advanced Learners of English*).

**My own presentations**

I delivered two presentations at EUROCALL 2017 on behalf of my co-researchers, (1) *Designing and Developing a Blended Course: Best Practices for Japanese Learners*, and (2) *Learning by Design: Bringing Poster Carousels to Life through Augmented Reality in a Blended English Course*. Two short papers have been published in the EUROCALL 2017 Conference Proceedings, both of which can be found in the reference list.

The first presentation (Mehran, Alizadeh, Koguchi, & Takemura, 2017) dealt with the stages involved in the design and development of an English for general academic purposes at Osaka University. Initially, the basic Successive Approximation Model proposed by Allen (2012) was introduced as the guiding instructional design model for the project. Following that, issues related to course design and development such as assessing Japanese learners’ language needs and e-learning readiness, course syllabus design including learning objectives and outcomes, choice of learning materials, tasks and activities, and technical support were discussed. Furthermore, the Quality Matters Higher Education Rubric was referred to as the guiding checklist in assuring course quality, and mention was also made of ways to ensure course compatibility with the needs of Japanese learners of English.

The second talk I gave at the conference (Alizadeh, Mehran, Koguchi, & Takemura, 2017) was concerned with the use of an augmented reality mobile application called BlippAR (https://blippar.com/en/solutions/blippar-for-education/) for augmenting student poster presentations. As part of a group term project, the students enrolled in a blended course of English at Osaka University were required to use the afore-mentioned website in order to overlay videos on their posters which could later be viewed by scanning the specified images on posters with the BlippAR app while using a corresponding code for each single image. My co-researchers and I found that in general the students had a positive experience using BlippAR for their poster presentations; however, there were several technical glitches such as the occasional delay in loading videos which troubled the students. There is no doubt that further research is needed so as to devise better and more efficient ways of applying these new forms of technology in the language classroom.

**Updates on newly-formed SIGs within EUROCALL**

Similar to most professional associations, EUROCALL has several special interest groups (SIGs): *Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), Virtual World and Serious Games, CorpusCALL, Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), CALL Teacher Education, and Intelligent CALL (ICALL)*. These SIGs and their members also had an active presence at the conference by holding their own meetings. Since 2016, two new SIGs have been established within
the association which I would like to introduce.

The first one is the LMOOC SIG. One of the recurrent themes at this year’s conference was MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), in particular language MOOCs (also known as LMOOCs). “MOOC” as a keyword appeared in the titles of as many as ten presentations, and given the exponential growth in this area, EUROCALL has established the LMOOC SIG as its newest SIG in 2017. For those interested, further details can be found at http://www.eurocall2017.uk/a-new-sig-for-eurocall-2017/.

Another EUROCALL SIG that was started by popular demand in 2016 was the Graduate Student SIG due to the increasing number of graduate students attending the conference (http://www.eurocall-languages.org/sigs/graduate-sig-homepage). This SIG, which works in close collaboration with its sister SIG at CALICO (Computer-Assisted Language Instruction Consortium), took a great initiative in supporting graduate students by holding a Q & A session to answer frequently-asked questions regarding what to expect before, during, and after one’s viva or thesis defense. Also in an attempt to give graduate students more visibility, the conference organizers defined a separate category for graduate student presentations known as the PhD track. Presenters were encouraged but did not have to give their speech in the form of pecha kucha (a Japanese word, literally meaning chit-chat). Pecha kucha as a style of presentation refers to giving a talk using twenty slides, each of which should take exactly twenty seconds to present (6 minutes and 20 seconds in total).

Mobile Application for Attendee Support

Details about EUROCALL 2017 was also listed on a mobile app called Guidebook (https://guidebook.com/), which allowed users to connect to other attendees, browse through the program and mark their own favorite sessions, find directions to the venue, share photos and updates, connect to the conference social media pages, and even check the weather forecast. It is worth noting that this app was not particularly developed for the conference, but instead it is a platform where organizers of any events could share important materials for attendees. Since it is available in a variety of languages including Japanese, it might be a good idea to use it for upcoming domestic and international conferences held in Japan as well.

EUROCALL 2017 Online Presence

The conference organizers and attendees were active on Twitter using the hashtag #EUROCALL2017 before, during, and even after the conference. One of the major contributions of the 2017 conference organizers was their on-going support for virtual attendees. Using a platform called Virtually Connecting, the distant participants were able to watch live streams of the keynote speeches as well as to synchronously video-chat with the keynote speakers and exchange ideas or ask their questions.

Publication Channels

All presenters were invited to submit short papers (up to 1600 words) for publication in the conference proceedings. Additional opportunities for publication in EUROCALL journals include
making submissions to the EUROCALL Review, a biannual online journal, as well as submitting full-length articles to the ReCALL Journal, published by the Cambridge University Press three times a year.

**Information about EUROCALL 2018**

EUROCALL2018 will be held at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, from August 22 to 25 with the theme of “Future-Proof CALL: Language Learning as Explorations and Encounters.” Further information can be found at https://www.jyu.fi/en/congress/eurocall2018.

In conclusion, I believe that attending the EUROCALL conferences provides academics with ample opportunities to keep abreast of the current trends of research and practice in CALL and to expand their academic networks beyond their own domestic circles since the EUROCALL community is highly welcoming to new members. I would also like to thank my supervisor, Professor Haruo Takemura, and Osaka University officials for sponsoring this trip.

**References**


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