Nothing is easier than to criticize a book for what it is not. CALL is an extremely complex and multifaceted discipline. Pedagogical theories and models, linguistic competences and skills, psychology and motivation, technologies and affordances, second and foreign language acquisition, learning goals and school types, teacher training and content authoring, engineering and design, contexts and cultures, learner characteristics and preferences, the transdisciplinary and diachronic dimensions: it is simply impossible to tackle all these aspects in one book. The main challenge for any author in CALL is to make clear choices. And to justify them.

A possible angle of attack is the supply-and-demand paradigm: to look at what’s on offer from the teachers’ point of view. And even here, there is a wide range of possibilities. Teachers may decide to use technology because it is available, because they are being pressured to do so, because they are impressed by
a number of innovative features, because they clearly need a number of functionalities in practice, because they want to adopt a specific pedagogical approach, because of specific attributes with proven effects on learning, because of the affordances of a new technology, because of the high mental acceptability and motivational power of a new technology, and last but not least simply because they need to design, build, and implement a powerful learning environment.

The book is built around six “phylogenetically evolved human qualities” (p. x), “inherent qualities that all learners, all humans, possess” (p. 1) or “cognitive qualities and powers” (p. 173): Homo Loquens, Homo Analyticus, Homo Socius, Homo Faber, Homo Ludens, and Homo Fabulans.

Chapter 1 explains the concept of the Homo Loquens (the speaker of tongues). It looks at CALL from the perspective of SLA. It formulates four common misunderstandings about technology and L2 acquisition. The Homo Loquens needs input. Not only comprehensible but also comprehended input.

The second chapter focuses on the Homo Analyticus (the L2 analyst): how technology can help learners focus on their L2 development. This chapter summarizes for language teachers what is known about CALL evaluation, evaluation of L2 progress, CALL pedagogy, TBLT, autonomous learning, and online L2 learning.

In the third chapter, the authors explain how they perceive the Homo Socius (the social human): “students seek out opportunities to sustain social interactions” (p. 100). An almost diachronic approach aligns first and second generation CMC, synchronous CMC, intercultural CMC, the sociocultural approach, social networks, tandem learning, and iCALL.

The title of Chapter 4 is Homo Faber (the tool user). It provides an overview of tutorial CALL, digital dictionaries, voice and audio tools, authoring systems, learning management systems, and tools for reading.

Chapter 5 is about the Homo Ludens (the playing learner). It presents research and caveats around the nature and affordances of games. The example of Mentira leads to a discussion in terms of pros and cons (p. 145).

Chapter 6 describes the Homo Fabulans (the story teller). It focuses on aspects such as corrective feedback, automated writing evaluation (AWE), collaborative writing, social reading, digital storytelling, fan fiction, and digital literacy. It also includes a presentation of the Cultura project.

Each chapter contains a summary, a list of further readings, discussion questions, activities, and a link to additional materials on the book’s website. The glossary at the end provides a useful list of keywords and abbreviations that are used in the book. The list of references is well-balanced and contains books and articles from various CALL-related journals, but also PhD dissertations and conference presentations, too often overlooked in publications that are written and submitted under pressure.
Continuing on this positive note, this book is well written, informative, highly readable, and relevant. One of its strongest points in my view is the extremely low frequency of nowadays pervasive—but persuasive—terms such as “blended,” “flipped,” “virtual,” “21st century,” “big,” “deep,” “serious,” “wild,” and “complex.” In decreasing order of frequency we find language, learning, students, CALL, technology, digital, new, learners, online, social, teaching, computer, second, tools, use, classroom, games, foreign, instructors, writing, process, time, task, university, input, linguistic, research, knowledge, world, and practice. This approach intends to inform teachers. It is a refreshing experience, completely in line with my vision and experience: we need to enable, empower, and equip teachers to determine for themselves which technologies to use, when, where, how, and why. “Language instructors need a system of deciding when, what, and how to use technology in the foreign language curriculum” (p. 35). The chapters provide excellent summaries of what is available in terms of useful knowledge and experience.

The Homo-typology presents itself as an original approach for looking at CALL. It is a novel, interesting tool for opening the wide array of possibilities. At the same time, this brings us to a couple of weaker points of the book. The authors do not explain where this Homo-typology comes from and how this typology builds on earlier taxonomies. Nor do I understand clearly how this would play in the learners’ mind.

The profile of the book is not as clear as I had expected it to be after reading it twice. The authors warn immediately that it is not a how-to manual (p. 10). Steven Thorne, who wrote the foreword, perceived it as a “road map for foreign and world language educators to navigate the complexities of twenty-first century technologies” (p. x) or even as a “comprehensive topological map” (p. xi). While the Homo-typology provides a sharp angle of attack, the concept of the book remains a little vague in my mind, and so is the intended audience.

Should technology substitute, augment, modify, or redefine learning activities and tasks? The SAMR model provides a useful and practical approach for language teachers, not mentioned in this book. Neither is the Technology Acceptance Model (which later evolved into the far too complex UTAUT model). I would also have preferred that the authors had explained why they did not mention any psychological-motivational theories and models such as Self-Determination Theory, Dörnyei and Ushioda’s L2 SELF model and ARCS. Nor did they mention any Instructional Design models.

All this is understandable, but my strongest point of criticism would be that the authors focus too much on higher education and on the United States. If this was on purpose, they should have explained their choice in the introduction. Literature and serious developments worldwide (e.g., Tom Robb’s Moodle Reader) have been somewhat ignored.
I was happy to find the correct term “digital classroom” instead of the incorrect “virtual classroom” in the title. However, there was one other word I had problems with: affordance. I mention it here because I think it is the most important word in the CALL world. But, in my view, its definition does not “refer to the advantages and disadvantages” (p. 177) of technological tools. The affordance of a technology is its perceived potential contribution to realize our goals. And “perceived” is perhaps the most important word here, after “goals.”

In conclusion, this is a commendable and recommendable book with a novel and interesting angle of attack. The authors wanted to write something different than CALL books that “tend to focus exclusively on the digital tools” (p. 1), and they largely succeeded in their endeavor. The chapters are extremely informative for language teachers who wish to understand the broader picture. The only major weakness in the book is that it does not mention nor explain nor justify well the choices made.

After finishing the book, the reader remains with the following issues in mind. First, there is the issue of “students and instructors need training” (p. 100) in using technology. TPACK and similar approaches may be counterproductive as they stigmatize teachers as ignorant, unmotivated, and unwilling. Teachers should be informed, enabled, empowered, and equipped to determine for themselves which technology to use, when, where, how, and why. But in order to get them motivated to do so, we first need to respect their vision, knowledge, and experience. They know more than we think.

Second consideration: Teachers should become designers. That is the only training they need. When teachers design the most optimal learning environment for their context, they will see and feel the need for specific functionalities, affordances, which they can partially or totally find in available technologies ... or not at all.

We need more CALL books like this one that do not patronize teachers, written by people who find the right tone to talk about CALL. If they more explicitly open up to the entire world and to more levels and types of education, focusing on the considerations mentioned above, they may find an excellent starting point for a new edition, or even for an entirely new book on CALL.

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