

9:00–10:00 3F Main Hall

a-002

CALL: A Strange Attractor in Language Education in South America

Vera Menezes

Under the assumption that language education is a chaotic system by its very nature, this presentation seeks to reflect upon the 10-year history of computer assisted language learning in the light of chaos theory metaphors. Throughout my presentation I will be talking about language education systems and about technology as an element thereof, though other elements such as educational policies, curriculum, language teaching and learning experiences play equally vital roles.

Learning a foreign language in South America is by no means an easy task as there are usually few opportunities for learners to interact with speakers of languages other than Spanish and Portuguese. Technology has always been the main element to bridge the distance between learners and speakers of other tongues in our continent.

Like all complex systems, language education is an open system and new elements, such as new technology tools, interact with the other elements of such a system, influencing them while they are in turn influenced by them.

The history of foreign language teaching has shown us that the normal route of the language educational system has suffered unexpected changes along its path: from codex and gramophones to computers and the Internet. But the impact of the Internet seems to have caused the strongest turbulence. The educational system has been destabilized evolving into a strange attractor, creating new bridges spanning the globe. The trajectory of an attractor never repeats itself and that is precisely what has been happening with CALL. It is impossible to predict its future route, although its impact can be likened to the advent of the printing press.

We cannot close our eyes to inequalities, though. This new digital route has created a digital divide increasing the gap between privileged and underprivileged learners, while educational policies keep trying to offer equal opportunities to the underprivileged.

Vera Menezes, PhD in Linguistics and one of the pioneers of CALL in Brazil, is a full professor of English and Applied Linguistics at Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, one of the most important universities in Brazil. She also assists Brazilian government and non-governmental educational organizations with their efforts to improve curriculum and university language education in Brazil. She is a former president of ALAB (Brazilian Association of Applied Linguistics) and of APLIEMGE (Teachers of English Association of Minas Gerais State). She has edited several books and published papers in Brazil and abroad. Her publications include:

- In press. Investigating interaction in an EFL online environment. *Handbook of Research on E-Learning Methodologies for Language Acquisition*. Idea Group.
- Tearing down walls and building up a collaborative learning community. *MEXTESOL Journal*. 29(2): 21-36, 2005;
- Feedback in the virtual environment. *PsychNology*. 1(3): 257-283, 2003; and
- CALL and online journals. In Debski, R. & Levy, M. (Eds.) *WorldCALL: Global perspectives on Computer-Assisted Language Learning*. (pp. 249-265). The Netherlands: Swets & Zeitlinger, 1999.

She is the editor of the Brazilian Applied Linguistics Journal and the coordinator of AMFALE, an international research project on language learning histories, in collaboration with several researchers from Brazil, Finland and Japan. This group is building an online data bank with narratives, including narrators regarding learning foreign languages in different contexts. Her most recent project aims at investigating chaos/complexity and metaphors in language learning multimedia narratives.