

AILA 2017 conference report

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As a Germany-based part-time doctoral researcher at the Open University in the UK I do not usually have the opportunity to benefit from the multiple possibilities for high-level academic exchange that an important conference such AILA2017 provides. In fact, working part-time to be able to afford doing research is often discouraged, as it excludes the doctoral researcher from many conference funding schemes.

Therefore I feel very proud and doubly honoured that I was awarded one of the AILA2017 Solidarity Awards. On the one hand this award constitutes a wonderful recognition of my research into part-time and freelance language teachers' professional development on Twitter. On the other hand I see it as an explicit statement of support for part-time researchers that strive for excellency in their doctoral research, despite economic and structural constraints.

Big conferences provide many opportunities for learning, networking and exchanges among colleagues, and the AILA2017 world congress was particularly fruitful in these areas. Delineating key learnings from all the ongoing conversations therefore is no easy task. However, there were certainly three memorable events that have inspired my work as researcher and language teacher educator in different ways.

The symposium 'Digital language practices and critical language/media awareness for the digital age' on the first full conference day brought together seven very different perspectives on the topic, ranging from investigations into online language and communication to social justice issues and the influence of algorithms on language teaching. Apart from raising my awareness for the complexity involved in doing social media research, I found the idea of regarding an algorithm as a text in its own right quite thought-provoking. On the second day my team colleagues from the [ICT-REV Team](#) and I presented the work we have been doing for the European Centre for Modern Languages in the field of language teacher education in the past nine years. Presenting my doctoral research in the wider context of language teacher education was an invaluable experience for me. The many conversations with different team members helped me adapt my theory-heavy presentation. Furthermore, the ensuing discussion with the lively audience confirmed the continued need for research on teacher professional development in many countries.

Last but not least both Thursday's keynote on sociolinguistics and (in)securitisation and a following talk on the fractal nature of language challenged traditional conventional approaches on language learning and teaching. The keynote questioned the notion of ordinariness of language classrooms in contexts of violence, something we often do not consider in our work as practitioners and researchers. The talk about the fractal nature of language suggested viewing language as a complex, dynamic and adaptive system. Although I had read about complexity theory before, some of the thinking I had struggled with became much clearer to me through this engaging talk.

Overall, this conference provided invaluable contacts for intellectual stimulus with regard to the post-structural framework I employ but also led me to think of better ways to ground it in practice. Other contacts, such as an invitation for a talk at a university in the UK, which arose from a lively post-presentation discussion, will certainly help me disseminate my research and to engage more widely with the field of Applied Linguistics. After the AILA2017 conference I presented my research approach within a symposium on Twitter for language learning, teaching and professional development at the EuroCALL 2017 conference in Southampton, UK. During this conference I connected the AILA SIG for doctoral researchers with the newly established EuroCALL 2017 Graduate SIG via Twitter and in personal conversations. In this way I could continue some interesting conversations I had at the AILA2017 conference with existing and new colleagues, which will probably lead to more concrete forms of co-operation and collaboration in the fields of language teacher education and professional development in due course.