[Book Review]

Autonomous Language Learning with Technology Beyond the Classroom

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Learner autonomy could be broadly defined as the learners' ability to take responsibility for their own learning process. It has been a major concern within the context of language learning as evidenced by the increasing research attention devoted to the subject over the past few decades (Little, Dam, & Legenhausen, 2017; Sanprasert, 2010). The increased popularity of technology-enhanced learning and the concomitant development of facilitating software have led to the reconceptualization of autonomous learning, attributing it a more complex and promising role (Reinders & White, 2016). Earlier thinking favoured a uni-directional relationship between technology and autonomous language learning, implying that the former improved the latter. Recent research efforts, however, put forth a bi-directional relationship between the two. Reinders and White (2016) underline this by stating that "not only that the use of technology for learning often requires a degree of autonomy, but also that our understanding of the impact of technology is changing our understanding of learner autonomy" (p. 143).

Considered from this perspective, the book Autonomous Language Learning with Technology Beyond the Classroom by Lai (2017) has offered a unique contribution in two directions: (1) it explores how technology-enhanced learning and autonomous learning have informed each other (2) it elaborates on how they transform language learning especially in out-of-class settings. The book is divided into three main parts organized in a way that takes the reader from a discussion of conceptual frameworks, through a well-presented research agenda, to helpful and detailed suggestions on promoting learner autonomy.

Part One: Understanding Out-of-Class Autonomous Language Learning with Technology

The first part is devoted to providing readers with a general understanding out-of-class autonomous language learning with technology. It includes four chapters on key concepts, theoretical frameworks, the nature of out-of-class language learning with technology and major factors impacting out-of-class language learning through technology, respectively. In the first

chapter, having presented the various aspects of autonomous learning, Lai (2017) has offered "a frame of reference for discussing autonomous learning with technology beyond the classroom" (p.16). This is worth attention as it provides the reader with a holistic understanding of aspects of autonomous learning. The next chapter starts with the acknowledgment that technology brings both affordances and restrictions to the development of autonomy. Most notable point in this chapter is the thorough overview of the extant theoretical frameworks associated with autonomous learning. Lai (2017) has reviewed these theories under three categories (i.e. theories focusing on learner experiences, theories focusing on factors affecting learners' technological experiences and theories explaining the development of autonomy with technology). Accurate and precise discussion of these theories is enriched through the presentation of studies based on relevant theories. To illustrate, the united theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) model (Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, & Davis, 2003) has been explained in details including its underlying theories. Lai (2017) also effectively explains the variables of the model to provide the readers with a full understanding of the model. Additionally, carefully chosen studies cited in the relevant part could guide the readers who are interested in academic investigations within the framework of UTAUT model. The same approach has been adopted for the other theories as well. This chapter ends with a theoretical framework conceptualized by Lai (2017) to illustrate various spaces with which out-of-class autonomous language learning with technology interacts and the dynamic relations in which it is situated (p. 45).

Part 1 continues by touching upon a range of issues including learner engagement and interaction with technology and the quality of different types of learning activities in an out-of-class context, which are thought to shape the nature of autonomous language learning. The author discusses each issue by providing evidence from up-to-date research activities, which leads the reader to the understanding that "language learners do, to varying degrees, use technological resources for language learning on their own" (Lai, 2017 p. 71). The last chapter of the first part functions as a backdrop for the rest of the book. It is a comprehensive overview of the influential factors affecting technology enhanced out-of-class autonomous language learning. Discussing the factors under the categories of learner-internal factors, learner-external factors and their interaction with each other, the author has offered an excellent review by referring to the most recent findings through an integrative perspective. To put explicitly, the author has shared a figure illustrating the internal and external factors based on the findings reported by Lai (2013). The discussion regarding the interaction among these factors is also supported by the findings from the relevant literature (Lai, Wang, Li, & Hu, 2016; Lai, Yeung, & Hu, 2016).

Part Two: Promoting Out-of-Class Autonomous Language Learning with Technology

Part 2 of the book explains how language educators support and foster learner autonomy through technology. This part is divided into three chapters, each of which concentrates on different points in promoting autonomy in language learners. The focus of chapter 5 is learner training. According to the author, understanding learners' perceptions of out-of-class language learning through technology is the first step of the process in helping them to be autonomous learners. The current literature on this topic is presented in detail, therein. A significant emphasis in this chapter is that learners should be provided with sufficient training on the use of technology on their own and guidance in developing a capacity for autonomous language learning as this capacity would not come to the students naturally. Chapter 6 focuses on teachers' role in promoting learner autonomy through technology. Lai (2017) has offered a list of points

for the teachers to guide them in their efforts for developing autonomous capacity in their in-class arrangements. Another list is presented on page 121 that explains what teachers could do to connect in-class and out-of-class learning experiences in promoting learner autonomy through technology. The last part of the chapter includes a set of suggestions for creating facilitative conditions for the teacher autonomy, which the author regards as a prerequisite for developing learner autonomy. The suggestions are further strengthened by extensive discussions from the relevant literature.

Part 2 ends with a chapter on exploring the topic from the perspective of resource and environment design, which includes material and tool design, and the construction of the learning environment. Under the title of design principles in relation to the language learning potentials, Lai (2017) has listed the key characteristics of quality language-learning materials based on a stimulating review of literature. The most notable part in this section is the design principles in relation to the characteristics of out-of-class learning, a relatively less charted area. Based on the various research findings, the author effectively summarizes the properties of technology-enhanced materials aimed to be used in language learning beyond the school setting. The principles listed could make an efficient base for material designers. Additionally, reader-friendly tables presented throughout the chapter contributes to the value of the content as they offer the readers a synopsis of the design principles of material and learning environment for autonomous language learning beyond the school setting.

Part Three: Researching Out-of-Class Autonomous Language Learning with Technology

The last part of the book takes an in-depth look at the research efforts made so far within the context of out-of-class autonomous language learning with technology. The need for and the significance of research to maintain the improvement of this growing field makes up the main theme of chapter 8. The author's attempt to group a wide-array of research into an accessible collection is noteworthy. Accordingly, Lai (2017) identifies three major areas of research on out-of-class autonomous language learning with technology. Studies on profiling the learners through investigating nature of and variations in autonomous language learning, learner interaction with technology and their construction of learning ecology represent the area of relatively more intense interest and research activity. Inquiry into the effects of out-of-class autonomous language learning with technology is the second strand of research in this terrain. The third key area of research is related to promoting out-of-class language learning with technology. Each area of research is mapped in detail with remarks pertaining to the contributions of the existent research to the field. The author also provides the readers with inspiring recommendations regarding the future directions of research within this field. Readers are advised to examine the tables presented throughout the chapter to have a quick understanding of what has been done so far and what should be done in the future research. The last section of chapter 8 discusses methodological considerations and challenges in investigating autonomous learning beyond classroom context. This section underlines the need for adopting innovative methodological tools to investigate and display the uniqueness of out-of-class language learning with technology in its own right. Having listed the major challenges in conducting research in this area, the author also provides the readers with a number of practical suggestions to overcome the challenges, which significantly adds to the quality content of the book.

Chapter 9, being the final chapter of the book begins with a concise summary of the contents of the volume, which is followed by suggestions for learners, teachers and material designers

listed succinctly concerning what should be done to develop autonomous learning in out-of-class settings through technology. This chapter ends with a research and development agenda that could be useful in developing learner-training programmes and technology-enhanced autonomous learning resources and environments.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Lai's (2017) book proves to be a rich resource for language teachers, language teacher educators, and researchers. Due to the fact that digital language learning resources have proliferated bringing about unprecedented changes in language education, it is now widely acknowledged that learners are extending their learning activities beyond the school walls (Lai & Gu, 2011; Motteram, 2013). This book compiles the significant considerations in how to support language learners in their technology-enhanced out-of-class learning practices. Insights into the theoretical framework are followed by research basis of language learner autonomy with technology. The second part regarding promoting out-of-class autonomous language learning with technology is particularly useful as it provides an in-depth and detailed guide for those either involved or who wish to be involved, in fostering autonomy in language learners through technology.

As a final comment, a word of suggestion might be offered here. Although the book provides language teachers and learners with useful guidelines on promoting autonomous language learning, one might expect to see some concrete practical examples of implementation. The book places heavy emphasis on theoretical frameworks and research findings. A brief section including a few examples of successful implementations of the principles of autonomous learning would make the publication stronger.

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