



## Review of *Digital language learning and teaching: Research, theory, and practice*

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### Digital language learning and teaching: Research, theory, and practice

Carrier, M., Damerow, R. M., & Bailey, K. M. (Eds.)

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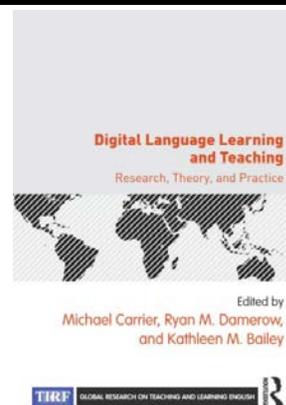
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There is no doubt that technology now provides more accessible ways to reach a vibrant hub of knowledge and learning resources than ever before. Indeed, the introduction of technology in language education has created new and great opportunities for language learners and teachers. Two worth mentioning are providing real language use in class and creating more interactive classroom environments (Stanley, 2013). With recent technological advancements, the article- and book-length treatment on the integration of technology in language education has also increased at an exponential rate over the last years. Contributing to this trend, *Digital language learning and teaching: Research, theory, and practice*, co-edited by Carrier, Damerow, and Bailey, provides language educators and practitioners with a snapshot of contemporary research in the application of digital technology in language education, in particularly English language teaching contexts. This edited book, organized into a preface, an introduction, and 19 chapters, is grouped into two main parts: Part I, *The research perspective* (the first 10 chapters after the introduction) and Part II, *The pedagogical perspective* (the last nine chapters). Part I presents the findings of some of the doctoral research funded by Doctoral Dissertation Grants from The International Research Foundation, while Part II, written by more seasoned researchers with remarkable experience in the use of technology in language education, places a focus on key advancement in digital language learning, teaching, and assessment.

The introduction, by Carrier, starts with the definition of digital learning, followed by the potential benefits to language learners and educators and the methods and theories of digital learning. Taking an all-embracing approach, Carrier defines digital learning as “the application of technology to the learning and teaching process” no matter whether “a specific practice is part of a CALL, TELL, generic edtech, or digital learning repertoire” (pp. 1–2). In looking at the affordances of technology, the author lists different categories of digital technology: (a) input technologies (e.g., interactive whiteboards, projectors, virtual reality headsets), (b) interactive technologies (e.g., online quizzes, videoconferencing), and (c) portable technologies (e.g., tablets, voting devices, and head-mounted displays). Further, Carrier makes several feasible suggestions for policymakers, so that digital language learning can be more fruitful.

Part I, including Chapters 2–11, reports on a variety of research studies such as quasi-experiential studies,

case studies, and corpus studies related, to a greater or lesser extent, to digital learning conducted by novice researchers who have just embarked on their academic careers. This part follows the format of a typical research article (e.g., the motivation for the research, the research questions guiding the study, the data collection and analysis, the findings and the implications). In Chapter 2, Chuang explains whether an online grammar practice application (i.e., GrammarTalk) can be effective for Chinese English for academic purposes students to master English grammar rules, particularly the English article system. Although Chinese students seemed to have positive attitudes toward using an online grammar practice program, the effects on English article development were not statistically significant, probably due to the short treatment phase. In Chapter 3, subscribing to the concept of nexus of practice, de Groot analyzes a group of Thai teacher trainees' digitally-mediated learning practices outside the English language classrooms and the affordances of such practices in their classroom learning performance. The results indicate that Thai teacher trainees get involved in a variety of digitally-mediated learning practices that, in turn, allow them to be more exposed to the target language in more communicative ways. The fourth chapter by Fitzgerald, Marín, Wu, and Witten emphasizes the use and importance of a data-driven learning approach in English for specific academic purposes (ESAP) classrooms. Using a new corpus-based tool (i.e., FLAX), the authors illustrate how contemporary corpus technology can be a useful tool to provide ESAP learners with authentic and salient lexico-grammatical features, particularly academic texts. Chapter 5 by Li and Chiu reports on an attitudinal study that focuses on Chinese doctoral students' attitudes and beliefs regarding the implementation of blended learning (BL) in an academic English writing course. The evidence suggests that BL is predominantly preferred by Chinese English as a foreign language (EFL) learners over face-to-face or fully-online teaching.

Turning to the flipped classroom, in Chapter 6, Mehring probes Japanese students' attitudes toward using digital technologies such as Moodle, PowerPoint, and LINE outside the EFL classroom applications and programs. The results show that flipped classrooms can make students more active in the learning process by creating a more flexible language learning environment. In Chapter 7, Olesova and Richardson compare the effectiveness of text-based and audio-supported feedback types using the instructors' background information and students' levels of proficiency (i.e., high- and low-level) as moderating variables. Overall, the feedback, be it text-based or audio-supported, did not significantly differ in terms of developing higher-order thinking whereas instructors' background and students' language proficiency levels played a significant role on students' reaching higher level of thinking. In Chapter 8 by Ronan, a digital learning platform called STEPS is used for strengthening content writing abilities of English language learners (ELLs). Even though this is a small-scale study with four participants, it provides some invaluable insights on how digital tools can help improve ELLs' literacy skills through self-directed learning. In Chapter 9, Rubadeau examines a group of teacher educators' (TEs) limited interactive whiteboards (IWB) use behaviors by focusing on the possible reasons behind such ill-practice. The results of this case study show that TE's lack of knowledge, issues pertinent to effective use of IWB, and peer and administrator pressure are among the most frequent reasons for avoiding digital tools in learning environment. Chapter 10, by Stranger-Johannessen, touches upon a slightly different aspect of the use of digital technology in an under-developed country with limited opportunities. More specifically, the author describes how utilizing African culture-based digital stories in classrooms can lead to the development of not only language skills but also overall literacy skills. However, the author also draws attention to the common challenges regarding the employment of digital technology in such settings, including teachers' limited computer literacy and insufficient technological infrastructure. Similarly, in Chapter 11, Vinogradova details how a group of learners get involved in the production of digital story in an academic ESL course where a pedagogy of multiliteracies (e.g., overt instruction, situated practice) is incorporated. The findings shed light on the way that digital stories can serve as communicative tools.

In the first chapter of Part II, which centers mostly on the pedagogical aspects of digital language learning, Peachey provides a broad overview of synchronous online teaching and the available online teaching tools (e.g., text chat, IWB). The author also discusses the challenges that teachers and students may encounter when using such tools, makes some informed suggestions regarding effective online

learning assessment, and finally ends the chapter by stressing the importance of teachers' personal development in using such technologies. Chapter 13 by Robinson and Harrison approaches digital language learning tools from a design perspective and introduces the concepts of learner experience (LX) and user experience (UX). The authors stress that when designing language learning products, developers need to pay close attention to each of the four components of LX (i.e., pedagogy, content, UX, and interaction). Several directed suggestions are also made for educational technology companies to improve the quality of digital language learning products. Chapter 14, by Sharma, explains BL in detail, covering different definitions and dimensions of BL (e.g., wide or narrow BL), models of BL (e.g., hybrid model), crucial elements of an effective BL course (i.e., appropriateness, complementarity, attitude, and training), as well as the future of BL (e.g., introduction of mobile learning and adaptive learning). In the following chapter, Stannard examines feedback on written works with a different viewpoint in terms of form and conveyance. The author describes how recent digital learning software such as JING, Screencast-o-Matic, and SnagIt can allow language educators to present more directed and effective feedback, which in turn may result in a clearer understanding. In Chapter 16, Stanley addresses the use of videoconferencing with primary school students in Uruguay as part of remote teaching practice. Despite some issues, such as poor internet connections, psychological distance that the remote teaching causes, and students' low level of readiness for remote teaching, using videoconferencing programs as pedagogical tools can benefit language learners with limited learning opportunities in remote places. Chapter 17, by Saville, addresses digital assessment with a special focus on learning-oriented assessment (LOA). The author stresses the need for a change from paper-based assessment to more computer-based LOA, so that more rapid, directed, and individualized feedback can be given to students. Given the fast developing advances in digital language learning, the author strongly suggests that digital assessment be part of language teachers' repertoire.

Chapter 18 by Carrier and Nye highlights that future teachers should be armed with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively exploit digital technologies in language classrooms, because as Fullan and Quinn (2015) note, "pedagogy is the driver, technology is the accelerator" (p. 82). After describing recent pedagogical approaches (e.g., BL, mobile learning, adaptive learning, and personalized classrooms), the authors touch upon more recent digital learning channels, such as massive open online courses, personal response system, and self-paced learning applications (e.g., Duolingo, Busuu), and accentuate the need for digital training for language educators. In Chapter 19, Lloyd, Rogerson, and Stead introduce a novel and relatively more sophisticated learning tool (i.e., virtual reality, VR) referring to the successful implementation of VR in medical education. After stating several advantages, such as providing opportunities to utilize a variety of tasks which are otherwise hard to implement in a real classroom environment, making students more motivated and active, and enabling contextualized and collaborative learning, they provide a list of available VR technologies such as virtual and augmented reality hybrids, simulators, and telepresence. This book ends with a prediction by Hockly and Dudeney regarding the future of digital learning technologies by 2020 and a discussion over the reflections of such new technologies on language learning settings. According to the authors, some of the digital learning models (e.g., BL, machine learning, adaptive learning, and flipped learning) will be more widespread than ever.

Overall, this edited book explores the current state of the implementation of digital learning technologies in English language classrooms in diverse contexts throughout the world. The book models good practice in that it combines not only established researchers' but also future professoriates' research on digital language learning. The chapters are bite-sized and thus easy to read. However, readers should be aware that some of the studies presented in Part I were conducted 8–10 years ago, and therefore the focus of the studies and the related findings might be a bit outdated. In addition, of these not-so-recent studies, a few are not strictly related to digital language learning. Although the book attempts to take a broader perspective in terms of topics covered, those who want to learn more about mobile-assisted language learning or games in language learning might want to refer to other resources (e.g., Pegrum, 2014; Skyes & Reinhardt, 2012). Most books on digital language learning, let alone this book, focus mostly on English

language learners and teachers. As such, scant attention is given to languages other than English. Further scholarly work addressing other languages is definitely needed.

In summary, this edited volume, as the title suggests, provides useful insights on digital language learning and teaching gleaned from research, theory, and practice, which undoubtedly makes an important contribution to online language learning pedagogy. The book can be a handy resource for those who are interested in a quick overview of the application of digital language learning over the last 10 years. Applied linguists and language educators who want to engage more deeply with current state of the art as well as the potential future advances in digital language learning can also refer to this book, particularly Part II.

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