



Review of *Autonomous language learning with technology beyond the classroom*

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Autonomous language learning with technology beyond the classroom

Lai, C.

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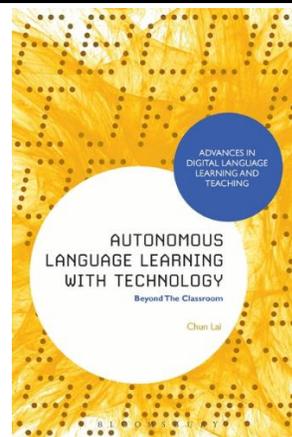
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Learner autonomy is widely recognized as a key element of language learning and has received a great deal of attention from L2 researchers and practitioners over the years (Little, Dam, & Legenhausen, 2017). In the field of computer-assisted language learning (CALL), there has been a growing interest in learner autonomy and its impact on language teaching and learning (Cappellini, Lewis, & Mompean, 2017; Reinders & White, 2016). It is evident that the continuing development of learner autonomy will only enhance the language development. Emerging technologies offer a variety of opportunities for autonomous language learning (e.g., Lee, 2016; Smith & Craig, 2013). The book *Autonomous language learning with technology beyond the classroom*, written by Lai, is a welcome addition to the existing CALL autonomy volumes. From theoretical frameworks and research agendas to suggestions for promoting out-of-class autonomous language learning through technology, the book is comprised of 9 chapters and is divided into three main parts. Part 1 lays the foundation by presenting key concepts and theoretical backgrounds and discusses learner-related factors that affect learner autonomy. As the core of the book, Part 2 deals with how digital technologies are used to promote autonomous language learning. To that end, Lai examines different aspects of autonomy from learner capacity and training to instructional scaffolding in the learning process. Furthermore, the author emphasizes the importance of making connections between in-class and out-of-class learning experiences by supporting learner autonomy with technology. The last part of the book centers on the research efforts by identifying research areas, findings, and challenges of conducting studies in the field of technology-assisted autonomous language learning.

Part 1 is made up of four chapters devoted to discussions of various aspects of autonomous language learning beyond the classroom. In Chapter 1, Lai gives an overview of autonomous language learning by introducing key concepts related to autonomy and technology. She further explores the nexus between autonomous learning and technology, emerging from a careful examination of the three important goals of autonomous learning: (a) autonomy as language learning, (b) autonomy as a language learner, and (c) autonomy as a person. The framework of reference for the relationship between autonomous learning and the three goals are particularly illuminating and useful to the reader. Chapter 2, entitled *Theoretical backgrounds and frameworks* provides a thorough review of theoretical perspectives associated with autonomous learning. The discussion, in conjunction with research studies, focuses on major theories under

three sections: (1) learner experiences, (2) factors affecting learners' experiences, and (3) development of autonomy with technology. The chapter ends with a useful conceptual framework proposed by Lai that helps the reader understand the complex and dynamic nature of the autonomous learning process.

Chapter 3 is the widest in scope, as it addresses several issues related to the nature of out-of-class autonomous learning, including learner engagement and interaction with different types of technology. Despite research efforts on some evidence supporting active learning outside the classroom, Lai presents a balance-oriented framework to assess learning outcomes from different dimensions. Chapter 4 moves to the discussion of both internal factors (e.g., gender, language proficiency, beliefs, and preferences) and external factors (e.g., peers, teachers, instructional types) that affect the development of learner autonomy. The author underscores the urgency of including both internal and external factors when selecting technological tools and designing activities for both inside- and outside-the-classroom learning environments. Lai concludes by calling for more research to address factors that affect technology-enhanced autonomous learning in out-of-class settings.

Especially welcome is Part 2, consisting of three chapters. It addresses how language educators can support and foster autonomous learning through technology beyond the classroom. Chapter 5 focuses on a discussion about learners' perspectives of and capacities for engaging in technology-mediated learning for the development of autonomous learning, whereas Chapter 6 addresses the role of teacher autonomy. In Chapter 5, Lai discusses ways to support effective and independent learning in technology-mediated environments. For example, the author stresses just how important digital literacy skills are to enable learners to evaluate technological tools and resources and use them in appropriate ways (e.g., Benson, 2013; Lai, Shum, & Tain, 2014). In Chapter 6, Lai proposes a process-oriented framework to guide teachers in using effective strategies to help students develop self-regulation outside the classroom. The author underscores that teachers should be trained to adopt a learner-centered pedagogy and create optimal online learning conditions through which students can work independently. More importantly, teachers need to help students build connections between in-class and out-of-class learning experiences (Henry, 2013). Rather than focusing on theory and research, Chapter 7 presents a discussion of material design and tool selection based on the relevant literature review. The author explains the three major design principles in relation to technological affordances: (a) maximizing language learning potentials, (b) maintaining a balance between in-class and out-of-class learning activities, and (c) utilizing learner-centric designs. Additionally, tables are used to illustrate a clear outline of the design principles for online autonomous learning beyond the classroom.

The final part of the book is dedicated to the research agenda of the application of technology for out-of-class autonomous language learning. Chapter 8 addresses three key areas of research and methods. Lai reviews and discusses some of the major studies in each key area of the research: (a) profiling learners, (b) evaluating learning outcomes, and (c) fostering autonomous learning with technology beyond the classroom. In the second part of the chapter, the author succeeds at critically identifying methodological issues of capturing learning processes and evaluating learning outcomes. Empirical findings from the current body of autonomy learning with technology are further discussed in the chapter. Throughout the chapter, the author utilizes tables to provide samples of showcase studies and highlights important future research. The chapter is useful for practitioners and researchers interested in investigating the field of digital technologies for autonomous language learning.

Chapter 9, the final chapter, entitled *Conclusion and the way forward* begins with several quotations from different fields and continues with a summary to highlight the major components of the volume. To advance the research in the field, Lai argues for a need for "a more holistic spatio-temporal approach that takes into consideration the interactions of different technological and non-technological spaces inside and outside the classroom" (p. 191). The chapter concludes by showing a list of practical recommendations along with a set of thought-provoking questions for educators who are interested in designing learner training programs and conducting research to build and promote autonomous learning with digital technology. The closing chapter should be of special interest to researchers, as it points to the special needs and research areas of

future studies.

According to Reinders and Benson (2017), most research studies have been carried out within the in-class contexts. This volume represents a much-needed contribution to the field of out-of-class autonomous language learning through technology, as it covers a wide range of discussions from many different angles. The book starts with theoretical considerations provided through extended literature reviews with numerous resources and continues with stimulating discussions on how to promote learner autonomy with technology beyond the classroom learning. The book ends with ideas and suggestions for future studies. The content is instructive with up-to-date information grounded in research findings. The organization is coherent and easy to follow. Figures and tables often accompany the text, giving the reader a quick way to visualize and understand large amounts of complex texts. In addition, the volume provides a comprehensive list of references. The book is not intended to provide definite answers or step-by-step of instructions to follow. Rather, it outlines new research directions and approaches to language learning autonomy through the use of technology beyond the classroom.

Despite the aforementioned strengths, the book has a few shortcomings. First, the lack of an introductory chapter is noticeable. It would have been valuable to include a chapter providing an overview of the topics presented in the book and of how the book is organized. Such a chapter could have helped the reader understand the goals and purposes of the book. Moreover, while many empirical studies and references cited throughout the book are useful, the reader may find it too theoretically oriented and not practical enough to apply. Concrete examples may be beneficial to language practitioners who are looking for models of pedagogical reports, project descriptions, or implementations, rather than precise research discussion. A website could be particularly helpful as a supplement to the book if the author were to use the space as a forum for discussing how practical activities might fit into the curriculum at large. It could provide additional auxiliary resources for teachers.

To conclude, the volume by Lai is well presented and it is timely, given the increasingly significant role played by digital technology in autonomous language learning. It is well suited for researchers, language practitioners, and graduate students interested in the field.

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Lina Lee is a Professor of Spanish at the University of New Hampshire, where she teaches courses in second language acquisition, foreign language methodology, and applied linguistics. She has conducted research and published articles on computer-mediated communication, telecollaborative exchange for intercultural learning, study abroad, peer feedback, and discourse analysis in *Foreign Language Annals*, *Hispania*, *CALICO Journal*, *Language Awareness*, *Language Learning & Technology*, *ReCALL*, *System*, and *International Journal of Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Teaching*.

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