With the increasing number of technologies available to enhance language learning experiences, as well as the growing number of distance learners and online and hybrid courses, there is a pressing need to effectively integrate technologies in teaching foreign language (Blake, 2013; Golonka, Bowles, Frank, Richardson, & Freynik, 2014). Comunicación mediada por tecnologías: Aprendizaje y enseñanza de la lengua extranjera [Technology-mediated communication: Learning and teaching foreign languages] provides a collection of studies carried out by leading language educators who are doing just this. In response to the notion that technology-mediated communication (TMC) is having a profound global impact on education (Luppicini, 2007), editors González-Lloret and Vinagre provide an excellent handbook for foreign language instructors who aspire to learn both the benefits and the challenges of integrating technologies into language classrooms and who accordingly take action within their own instruction practices. The book provides the means for instructors to effectively implement language-learning technologies and understand their utility, thus convincing students and colleagues of the advantage that these tools offer (Son & Windeatt, 2017).

The 11 studies in this book originate from Europe and the United States and are written in Spanish, demonstrating the strength of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) scholarship and practice in the Spanish-speaking world. The compilation covers an array of interconnected themes including TMC in language learning, linguistic fluidity and precision, intercultural communication, multimodal digital competency, active participation in a community of practice, negotiation of meaning, student motivation, critical thinking, and analytical skills, and it also touches on learner autonomy. While each is unique in scope and mode, the chapters remain connected through the integration of TMC and a focus not only on linguistic development, but also on other forms of knowledge and competencies, such as digital competence.

González-Lloret and Vinagre begin the book by providing an overview of the terms computer-mediated communication (CMC) and TMC, preferring the latter because “communication can be mediated by technologies other than computers” (p. 2). The editors provide a brief overview of the characteristics of TMC, suggestions of its utility in the second language (L2) classroom, and a partial review of previously conducted studies focused on its benefits and limitations. Also helpful in the first chapter are definitions of
telecollaboration, virtual collaboration, and collaborative and cooperative learning, along with the role that TMC plays in these approaches. The editors close with their own summary of each chapter, propose insightful questions to keep in mind while reading the book, include a self-critique of what the book is lacking, and suggest calls for future research.

Chapter 2 is devoted to using digital social tools—specifically blogs, wikis, and chats—in the collaborative L2 writing process. Authors Oskoz and Elola emphasize that the practice and skill of writing is currently receiving more attention from students and teachers than ever before, and they suggest it might be due to the easy access and facilitation of these digital tools for students. Notably helpful in this chapter is the discussion of the challenges that encompass the use of such TMC technologies, paired with a helpful guide to implementation. The authors also offer pedagogical suggestions. For example, they write that wikis seem to be the most ideal tool to focus on concrete grammatical aspects, while chats are more appropriate to work on composition structure. Oskoz and Elola encourage future research on the potential impact of Twitter and Facebook on writing, and in the case of blogs, they ask whether they are perhaps better for the development of content and intercultural communication.

The main benefit of Chapter 3 is its direct application of a framework that integrates content and foreign language learning models for written communication. Author Pérez Cañado describes the differences and similarities among the integrated learning of contents and foreign languages, English as a medium of instruction, and CMC approaches and the effect that they have specifically on communicative writing skills. Also included is a discussion of concepts such as flipped classrooms, active learners, risk taking, increased motivation, and confidence. A key component of this chapter is the description of a few technological tools for CMC, along with a discussion of their potential for written L2 interaction. The author concludes with a review of studies on computer-mediated written communicative interaction that have been carried out in bilingual classrooms at various educational levels.

Chapter 4 is devoted to a telecollaborative project based on a pedagogical model for the implementation of digital stories and carried out between students at the University of Valencia and Wofford College. Authors Sevilla Pavón and Gimeno Sanz explain the steps followed in the project, beginning by describing what comprises digital stories and telecollaboration and arguing that authentic real life contexts for language and culture learning develop intercultural competence. Readers interested in developing a telecollaborative project can benefit from the detailed description and evaluation of the project. A notable strength of this piece is the interweaving of pedagogies, theories of telecollaboration, and digital storytelling projects insofar as they “involve active methodologies and approaches to the teaching of languages capable of fostering synergies that encourage the involvement of students in their own process of learning the target language and its culture” (p. 65). This chapter serves as a reminder that technology use can help foster discovery in real contexts of use, through direct contact and collaboration with native speakers of the target language and cultures. Research on higher education (Vinagre, 2016) and secondary education (Jauregi, 2012) has shown this to be advantageous for the development of intercultural competence.

Chapter 5 is another thorough and relevant discussion of a telecollaboration model incorporating the transversal, sociocultural, and content competencies proposed by the Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación de España [National Agency for the Evaluation of Quality and Accreditation of Spain] in the university context of the teaching of English for specific purposes. Authors Jordano de la Torre and Rodríguez Arancón evaluate the project by analyzing classroom data such as student’s video presentations, exit questionnaires, and tutor observations. They describe in detail the design and implementation of tasks employed to encourage interaction among students from different fields and different countries in the target language. Especially meaningful is the inclusion of data from a survey five years after completion, revealing a general consensus that all the participants “were in agreement that this type of initiative helped them carry out better work” (p. 83). The chapter exemplifies the benefits of telecollaboration and effectively demonstrates how linguistic, technological, social, and individual competencies, along with more systematic skills, are key to the development of 21st century citizens.

Three-dimensional (3D) and virtual reality worlds are made much more manageable and less daunting to
foreign language instructors in Chapter 6, with a description of two successful projects carried out using Second Life and OpenSimulator. The chapter shows that much of the conversation generated in a 3D virtual world (3DVW) is triggered by the specific context in which the conversation takes place and is largely unpredictable, reflecting real-life communication. Authors Jauregi and Canto describe in detail two projects: one among university students of Spanish as a foreign language in the Netherlands and the other with middle school students in schools in the Netherlands and Finland. The authors identify the pedagogical benefits of utilizing a simulated interaction context, highlighting the need for experiential learning that includes problem solving and complex collaboration and demonstrating their relations to communicative opportunities, motivation, and the development of intercultural awareness. Although the authors also remind readers that 3DVWs are not without their challenges, they attest that these virtual spaces can be a positive contribution to the language learning process and should become considered for language programs. Jauregi and Canto conclude with an argument that 3DVWs are effective because they make language learning more relevant and meaningful through exploration, interaction, and play.

In Chapter 7, author Collentine uses a communicative language teaching framework to consider how input and output can affect each other in a virtual world (VW) learning environment. By examining several background studies, the author considers the syntactic and lexical complexity that can be achieved through task-based learning in VWs. Two specific examples are presented, each one an independent project with its own research questions, participants, analysis, and conclusions, but with similar methodology. The main conclusion is that there are many aspects of language acquisition (e.g., linguistic complexity) to investigate in VWs and that this research will undoubtedly evolve rapidly along with the technology and the type of communication that it affords. A strength of this chapter is the innovative studies that Collentine presents, providing researchers and instructors a more unique understanding of how language acquisition is impacted by the linguistic input and the actions and production of learners in a VW.

Chapter 8 is dedicated to oral competence and ways to facilitate authentic face-to-face interactions via TMC. Author Bueno-Alastuey investigates the potential of oral synchronous computer-mediated communication (OSCMC) to produce language-related episodes (LREs), guide learner attention to erroneous forms, and facilitate input modifications while producing comprehensible input. As postulated in the previous study, the use of OSCMC in the class is found beneficial due to the large number of LREs that occur—although limitations due to task and interlocutor diversity should be taken into account.

Describing three cases of distance-learning teacher trainees, in Chapter 9, Vinagre echoes previous discussions that TMC implementation requires specific teacher knowledge best developed through collaborative, experiential training. Exploring collaborative dynamics, strategies, and behaviors, the author highlights positive reactions from the three participants and implicates future research that explores the role that TMC plays as a space for intercultural negotiation among trainees from various backgrounds. A larger study would allow more robust conclusions to be drawn.

In Chapter 10, Dooly focuses on the role of the L2 instructor as a promoter of the linguistic, digital, and interpersonal competencies that are essential for students. Based on a series of collaborative exchanges between students in the United States and Spain, Dooly uses socio-constructivist theory to suggest a few key points for the design of telecollaboration projects. To answer how instructors might integrate shared knowledge in their classes, Dooly proposes that the first step be a shift in perspective placing emphasis on the student, and not on the technology. Being intentional with planning as well as clear and communicative with students about project structure and expectations is also essential. Central to the project design are the tasks and scaffolding, as they are all deeply interconnected. With many detailed and clear examples, the chapter is excellent due to its practical approach and provision of specific details that can be immediately implemented.

In the penultimate chapter, González-Lloret provides a panoramic review of studies that highlight the importance of pragmatic competence in a highly globalized world, asking whether and how TMC might contribute to the development of L2 sociopragmatic competence—an essential skill to develop in an increasingly globalized, communicative world. Her argument is especially relevant considering that
pragmatic errors endanger communication more so than phonetic, lexical, or grammatical errors, and can cause frustration and relationship rupture.

Ortega concludes the volume with a vision of future TMC studies that explore the acquisition of languages by investigating how TMC might provide contexts for the development of digital competencies in language use that transfer to other contexts and add social value to the learning of languages. She proposes that beside the most investigated areas (sociocultural, intercultural, and linguistic acquisition), research should focus on the affective as well, including motivation, authenticity, choice, creativity, and community. Ortega further urges for more studies in high-school and middle- or primary-school contexts. While her motivation is derived from the current scarcity of studies in these age groups, her primary aim is to understand the benefits that TMC can have on students of different ages. Finally, the chapter calls for investigation of how TMC can address the needs of populations like immigrants, refugees, people of scarce economic resources, and those with physical and cognitive disabilities, providing fair and equal access to language learning and the development of digital skills inside and outside traditional classrooms. In a succinct and meaningful conclusion to the book, Ortega reminds readers that “likewise, in the field of foreign language education, TMC erodes the rigid demarcations not only between the classroom and the ‘real’ world, but also between the pedagogical and the playful and between the native and globalized” (p. 214). This poignant close to this chapter, and subsequently to the book itself, is in fact a call to adjusting our methodologies to reflect innovations in teaching and in technology, making changes that forge more connections and close more gaps.

While this practical book is extremely useful for instructors and teaching assistants of foreign languages who aim to integrate technology into hybird, virtual, or more traditional classrooms, in its current form, it is only accessible to readers of Spanish. Though this might be considered a limitation by some, it is in fact encouraging, as it represents the linguistic diversification of CALL and TMC research itself. As a result, this book boasts a reflection of what researchers around the world have called for, but what has been difficult to practice because of the demands of global publishers. In any case, perhaps translations of this essential volume might be published in other languages to expand audience reach. Another major highlight is the inclusion of the fifth aspect of language teaching: culture. Along with comprehension and production, the importance of culture in language learning and teaching (Scarino & Liddicoat, 2009) is very much pronounced in most of the chapters. Complementing this feature is the conclusion, which not only acknowledges but also summons action and emphasizes the affective advantages, social value, power to bridge cultures, and impact on inequity and justice that TMC can have.

All in all, the volume is well-structured and clearly targeted at a specific audience. The research in the volume is diverse and timely. The book is expertly organized and easy to follow, beginning with a clear grounding in TMC. Scaffolding is apparent within each individual study as well as in the book as a whole, with each chapter building on the work of the previous one. Each chapter includes discussion of theory and motivations, a clear methodological framework, and pedagogical implications and closes with a look at what the authors hope to see in the future. The authors are united in agreement that the learning objective and task should be of primary importance and that the TMC tools should be selected based on what aligns best with task goals—not the other way around. They also agree on the importance and urgency of these themes and advise current and future language practitioners to follow suit. Overall, the volume provides a comprehensive and diverse set of examples that provide the reader with many useful theoretical approaches and suitable tools to enhance the traditional, online, or hybrid L2 classroom.

Notes

1. Any quotations taken from the reviewed book are author translations from Spanish to English.
References


About the Author

Lillian Jones is a doctoral student at the University of California, Davis studying Hispanic linguistics and second language acquisition. Her research interests include computer-mediated communication, computer-assisted language learning, and pedagogical applications of messaging apps and social media.

E-mail: liljones@ucdavis.edu