

BOOK REVIEW



Review of *Technology and Language Teaching*

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Technology and language teaching

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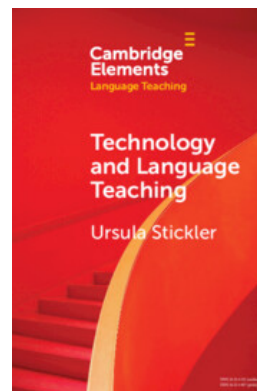
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The sudden outbreak of COVID-19 compelled language teachers to transition rapidly to online teaching. This transition presented challenges for student engagement and the evaluation of learning outcomes (Suárez & El-Henawy, 2023). To help language teachers address these challenges and to enhance their online teaching abilities, Stickler wrote *Technology and Language Teaching* (2022). Unlike other texts on this topic (for example, Karim et al., 2023; Russell & Murphy-Judy, 2020), Stickler’s book stands out for having adopted a research-based and pedagogy-focused approach and for considering the needs of researchers, practitioners, and teacher trainers. Furthermore, the author incorporates two new theoretical frameworks—the STAR framework and the three-dimensional framework (Shi & Stickler, 2019). Stickler uses these techniques to guide readers through the process of selecting tools, adjusting teaching strategies, and creating positive online learning environments. Overall, the author provides comprehensive theoretical and practical guidance for teacher trainees and individuals interested in the foundations of online language learning (OLL). Stickler’s book is a must-read for online language teachers and teacher trainers working in today’s digital age.

The book is comprised of six sections, advancing from epistemology and learning theory to suitable teaching methods and practices for online learning environments. The sections are logically organized from broader to more specific themes, with each section presenting relevant background information before focusing on finer details. Stickler combines theory and research effectively and ends each chapter with either a reflection or a practical task for teachers.

In Section 1, Stickler provides readers with an overview of the target audience for the book, the structure of each section, and the main themes. Additionally, to facilitate readers’ comprehension of subsequent chapters, the author clarifies several important points useful for distinguishing between online teaching and traditional face-to-face teaching. The author emphasizes that online teaching involves more than just terminology, as it encompasses changes in teaching methods and ideologies. Next, Stickler introduces the innovative STAR (Space, Time, Accreditation, and Role) framework to lay the foundation for discussions in the following chapters. According to Stickler, the framework can help language teachers describe their teaching practices more precisely and identify constraints and changeable aspects of their teaching situation.

Seeing as teachers' understanding of language learning theory may impact their instructional practice, in Section 2, Stickler delves into the theoretical foundations of OLL, including human epistemological positions, language learning theories, and the distinct requirements of OLL. The author examines socio-cultural learning theory, critical constructivism, ecological learning theory, and connectivism learning theory, along with their application to OLL. In addition, Stickler highlights the differences between online and face-to-face teaching through a consideration of practice, epistemology, and communicative modes. According to the author, understanding these differences can help teachers design effective instruction and support learners more efficiently. For example, by understanding the concept of meaning construction—which refers to the process of helping learners understand and interpret the language they are learning—teachers can better support the efforts of online language learners.

In Section 3, Stickler focuses on teaching methods suitable for OLL. The author begins the section by reviewing the development of language teaching theories and the field of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) in reference to the STAR framework. The author also introduces Shi and Stickler's (2019) three-dimensional framework as a basis for describing changes in language teaching. This framework covers three dimensions of the teaching context, including the visibility of technology, the authenticity of communication (that is, the degree of genuineness in language practice), and the degree of teacher involvement in language learning. Next, the author presents five scenarios — both actual and hypothetical — to illustrate the ways in which technology (specifically the Internet and digital tools) influences language teaching. Finally, to equip language teachers with effective teaching methods for OLL, the author presents successful online activities that may enable a power shift from the teacher to the student. The activities include sharing professional knowledge, transferring power through eTandem learning, and engaging in project-based learning. The author advocates for an approach where technology serves as a supportive instrument in language education, reinforcing core pedagogical strategies rather than becoming the primary focus of instruction.

In Section 4, Stickler delves into the practical details of OLL to help teachers adapt effectively to this new environment. First, the author highlights the forces driving the transition to online teaching, including advances in information and communication technologies (ICT) and the emergence of COVID-19. These developments have influenced teachers' attitudes toward OLL and underscored the necessity for educators to acquire appropriate skills and methodologies. In response, Stickler provides resources and tools for skill training (for example, LINCDIRE: <https://lite.lincdireproject.org>), and describes how teachers can realign their teaching methods with the three-dimensional framework. Similar to the close of the previous section, the author calls for an epistemological reflection to help teachers ensure that their pedagogical strategies remain cutting-edge and responsive to educational evolution.

To provide readers with a deeper understanding of how research findings can improve practice, in Section 5, Stickler shares specific examples of research projects centered on OLL. First, the author denies the notion that there is a one-way transfer from research to teaching. Instead, Stickler encourages teachers to be actively involved in research by reading published articles, collaborating with peers, and learning from their students. The author mentions different types of research (for example, survey research and eye-tracking) but highlights action research as a means of obtaining direct feedback on teaching effectiveness. Next, Stickler details four examples of the successful integration of research findings with teaching practice. The authors of the studies employed different research methods to address key topics related to OLL, such as teacher attitudes towards OLL, the effectiveness of collaborative learning, and shifts in learner focus during online interactions. Stickler concludes the section by highlighting the importance of ongoing research and by suggesting several resources for teachers who have yet to find an effective way to keep up with the latest research. In sum, Section 5 serves the practical purpose of inspiring OLL educators to apply research findings and improve their teaching methods on an ongoing basis.

In Section 6, Stickler anticipates future changes in OLL and offers practical suggestions for addressing these changes. The author acknowledges that technological developments and COVID-19 accelerated the growth of OLL and prompted shifts in language teachers' roles and the language teaching industry.

Drawing from a survey that invited language teachers from ten countries to imagine language education in the 2030s, five possible teacher roles were proposed (for example, designers, mediators, and critics). The roles illuminate some potential directions for the evolution of OLL and underscore the belief that language teachers will continue to be needed. Some respondents, however, held the pessimistic view that technology might render language learning less meaningful and language teachers less necessary. The author disagrees with this viewpoint and presents an optimistic perspective in which the demand for language instruction persists, since language functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a conveyor of worldviews and culture. Thus, the author advises language teachers to embrace technology and enhance their abilities, both in imparting language knowledge and in fostering students' empathy. According to Byram (1997), this approach can cultivate an attitude of openness and inquiry in learners, while teaching communication skills that extend beyond mere language transfer and translation.

The major strength of the text lies in Stickler's innovative STAR framework for describing distinct language teaching situations. Shi and Stickler's (2019) complementary three-dimensional framework is also important for understanding how technology impacts various aspects of teaching. Compared to other theoretical frameworks focused on instructional design and technology integration, such as the Community of Inquiry Framework (Garrison et al., 2000), the SAMR Model (Puentedura, 2006), and the RAT Framework (Hughes et al., 2006), the STAR framework and the three-dimensional framework are more comprehensive, practical, and operational. Both frameworks address essential elements of online learning environments, including space, time, authenticity, teacher roles, and learner roles. Moreover, the interrelated nature of these elements enables educators to consider multiple aspects of the teaching situation rather than focusing on a specific subject level. Stickler's frameworks combine real-world factors with teaching goals, empowering educators to make informed decisions regarding technology integration and optimizing OLL practices. Ultimately, the frameworks can support teachers in creating engaging online learning environments and in aligning assessment practices with teaching objectives.

Second, the book is widely applicable, catering to readers with diverse backgrounds and preferences. By presenting a balanced blend of theory, practical strategies, reflective exercises, and research, it meets a range of educational needs. The author further enhances accessibility by tailoring the content to distinct learning paths. This approach ensures that teachers with various degrees of experience can harness the material and be successful in OLL. For individuals interested in online language learning principles, the book delves into various learning theories and their application to OLL. Experienced teachers can use the book as review material, focusing on Stickler's advice and the examples of OLL to enhance their existing knowledge. Online language teacher trainers may find the reflective tasks and training resources in the book helpful for mastering skills needed for online or blended learning environments. Additionally, the book can be used in language teacher training programs through flipped pedagogy. The main text could be designated as preparatory reading and the tasks as homework, allowing for the outcomes of the tasks to be presented during class discussions. Ultimately, Stickler instills confidence in readers regarding the effectiveness of online teaching methods.

Third, the book has extremely high readability and practicality. Through the inclusion of vivid case studies and the author's personal experience, Stickler blends theory and practice effectively, rendering complex concepts and theories more accessible. The author presents concise, clear explanations of OLL theory and practice. In addition, the author empathizes with readers and addresses their needs by offering feasible solutions to practical problems. Stickler provides valuable teaching resources and guidance, including steps for designing online courses and for evaluating online teaching outcomes. Overall, the book's content will facilitate readers' understanding and application of OLL principles.

Although the book provides many useful suggestions for improving OLL, it has a few limitations worth noting. One limitation is the placement of case studies at the end of Section 4, rather than with the discussion of the three-dimensional framework in Section 3. This editorial choice could result in the framework's description being perceived as abstract, and in turn, making it challenging for readers to connect the framework with its application. Additionally, while the book presents some research to

support its theoretical arguments, there is room for extensive development. For instance, the analysis is limited to a few extreme teaching cases when discussing the application of the proposed theoretical framework. Incorporating more examples across different language modalities, such as reading, listening, and writing, would enhance the text's comprehensiveness. Despite its limitations, the book serves as an excellent guide for language teachers seeking to enhance their online instruction capabilities. Language teachers can refer to learning theories, research findings, and instructional resources presented in this book, while gradually improving their teaching practice.

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