

REVIEW OF *TEACHING LANGUAGES ONLINE*

Teaching Languages Online (2nd ed.)

Carla Meskill & Natasha Anthony

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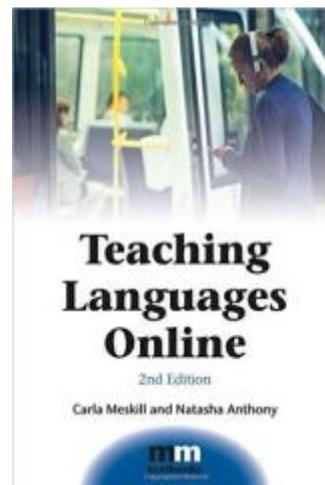
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Multilingual Matters

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Review by **Jeffrey Maloney and Jie Liu, Michigan State University**

As online technologies become more prevalent and ubiquitous, an increasing amount of programs are finding ways to take advantage of the online platform for delivering education to students. This trend is extending more and more to language instruction. *Teaching Languages Online*, by Meskill and Anthony, provides language educators with a comprehensive introduction to methods that encourage effective language teaching and learning in a variety of environments. The authors preface their second edition as being focused on increasing the abilities of both novice and experienced teachers to deliver dynamic and successful language instruction in blended or online formats. Readers will notice that sprinkled throughout the book are definitions and explanations of principles of language learning and teaching supported by research, which makes the volume more accessible to teachers who may have limited training in language pedagogy. Of specific focus are four different modes of online communication: oral synchronous, oral asynchronous, written synchronous, and written asynchronous. The authors outline multiple strategies for deploying online resources into systematic teaching processes to benefit language educators in various contexts. Also listed are relevant online resources for language educators at the end of each chapter.

Compared to the first edition published in 2010, the new edition integrates the latest online tools and materials to date, which makes it suitable for instructors who are looking for the latest resources. The authors note that with the unprecedented growth of technology, students are increasingly using their mobile devices to practice or learn languages. As a result, instructors are competing for students' attention since the environments in which the students are learning are not as focused as the classroom. Meskill and Anthony have attempted to address this problem by providing suggestions for ways to compensate. For instance, they illustrate how teachers can use chat areas to assure students' attentiveness in oral online environments; the creative employment of images can be used to attract students' attention and elicit discussion in written environments. Another addition is the use of multiple instructional uses of three-dimensional virtual worlds (e.g., Second Life) to build online target language environments that resemble authentic situations and carry out meaningful task-based language teaching and learning methods. This new edition also includes more illustrations on new tools and their applications in a wider range of languages, including English, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, and Japanese.

The authors provide readers with practical strategies and examples on how to make use of various online tools and resources in each instruction module. Each chapter is presented in relatively the same format but adjusted to focus on the different environments. Strategies included are calling attention to forms, guiding learners to use target structures, and providing feedback. Each chapter also ends with summaries and sample activities.

The first chapter offers an overview of what the authors term *the essentials* for online language teaching (p. 2). Included are brief discussions of time commitment, task structure, and assessment. After a general introduction of essentials for effective online language teaching in Chapter 1, the authors focus Chapters 2 and 3 on language learning and teaching in oral synchronous and asynchronous online environments. For instance, instructors can refer to the task toolkit—which includes essential language elements for a given task—when they want to emphasize a certain structure. In oral asynchronous teaching environments, instructors and students interact by posting audio and written messages. Meskill and Anthony further highlight websites such as [Voxopop](#) and [VoiceThread](#) that offer free tools for asynchronous voice communication. Chapter 4 offers a review of the previous two chapters and discusses how to enhance oral instruction with text and visuals.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on various teaching methods for written instruction in synchronous and asynchronous online environments. In written synchronous environments, real-time written exchanges occur in the form of chat or texting. The authors provide a number of examples to illustrate how online instructors can incorporate a variety of virtual resources, such as chatting tools, videos, dictionaries, and three-dimensional games to guide students' attention and facilitate practice. They also introduce strategies on how to integrate multimodal resources for effective teaching. Written asynchronous online environments have been proven extremely successful and are also considered by some educators as the most widely used and simplest to manipulate. The authors discuss how to incorporate multimodal tools and resources with ample time allowed in the environments to guide students' attention and develop appropriate tasks. In Chapter 7, they also review how to use sound and visuals to effectively increase salience and familiarity with the materials along with promoting attentiveness to each lesson or module.

In the last chapter, Chapter 8, the authors summarize the advantages and versatility of language teaching and learning in online formats. They briefly review the five skills of reading, listening, composition, speaking, and pronunciation and intonation. They include a review of different kinds of curricula that instructors can use as a base for their classes. With the abundance of multimodal online news programming and literature, instructors can easily access these resources to develop a current-events-based or literature-based curriculum. The authors also discuss how virtual environments can offer information about the target culture, which can add depth to a culture-based online curriculum. Other types of curricula including theme-based, grammar-based, specific purposes-based, and functions-based are discussed as well. The authors also list what constitutes good instructional design, and they view *flexible responsiveness* as the primary principle (p. 223).

In summary, *Teaching Language Online* provides a positive contribution to language pedagogy in online contexts. It covers a wide swath of strategies and practices for instruction in different environments and ways to produce tasks and lessons that can maintain attention and provide focused instruction and feedback. It may be more suited to contexts in which instruction is mostly focused on online experiences where interactions are mostly with the instructor or other students (e.g., discussion boards or blogs). While Meskill and Anthony provide ideas for free online tools, the strategies and discussions on how to incorporate major social media platforms may also be helpful. Overall, *Teaching Languages Online* is appropriate as a reference for online instruction in a variety of blended learning or online-only contexts. Instructors looking for a broader understanding of practices and techniques for online language instruction may be well served by this text. Instructors new to online language teaching are able to obtain systematic information on each instructional move, and the inclusion of introductions to different terms and teaching methods make it very approachable. Experienced instructors can also refer to this book for a

list of updated tools and resources. In addition, the authors manage to take into consideration both a focus on forms and a focus on meaning aspect of language in teaching, further adding to its appeal.

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