



Review of *Open education and second language learning and teaching: The rise of a new ecology*

Inés Vañó García, The Graduate Center (CUNY)

Open education and second language learning and teaching: The rise of a new knowledge ecology

Blyth, C. S., & Thoms, J. J. (Eds.)

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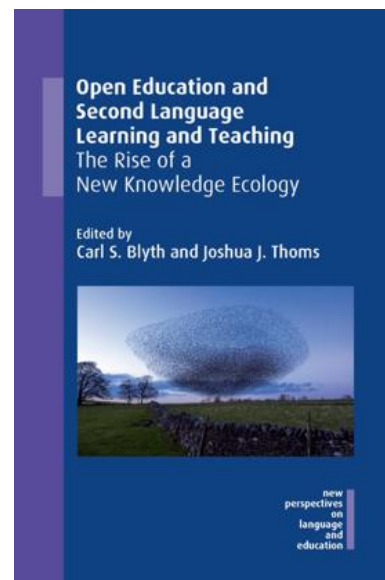
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While the world of Open Education Resources (OERs) is growing, and (second) language educators are becoming familiar with these resources, there is an urgent need to be aware that they do not work in isolation: OERs are meaningful and acquire their potential within the Open Educational Practices (OEPs) framework. Carl S. Blyth and Joshua J. Thoms, the editors of this volume, make sure to sustain this pedagogical approach as the core of this book while offering multiple perspectives on OERs and language education. *Open Education and Second Language Learning and Teaching: The Rise of a New Knowledge Ecology* builds upon the understanding that second language (L2) education is a field of study within an Open Knowledge Ecology. This ecological framework (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016; Kramsch, 2008) highlights the interconnectedness and dynamicity of the knowledge field wherein knowledge is constantly created, circulated, and disseminated across varied levels and spaces of the system. Considering the overall ecosystem where students are always at the center, the editors make sure to incorporate the stakeholders (i.e., social agents) involved at each level of the system, including students and educators, institutions, communities, the administration, and wider networks of language educators.

It is well-known that the open education movement within language education has been driven mostly by the discontent with and high-cost of language textbooks. The dissatisfaction with the monolithic approach of *one language - one culture* presented in textbooks has increased the visibility of language educators searching for alternatives with significant cultural, socio-political, and content-based material that speaks to students. As evidenced by the multiple chapters of this collection, increased use and engagement with OERs by language educators is creating opportunities to question traditional approaches to language instruction. Open Educational Practices (OEPs) as a pedagogical approach to language teaching facilitates the development of students' agency and critical thinking skills, and fosters inter- and intra-disciplinary

collaborations. As Esperanza Román-Mendoza affirms, the time has come “to approach all learning issues from a new angle, questioning the beliefs, ideologies, and values which, consciously or unconsciously, have shaped our understanding of second language learning (L2)” (2018, p. 2) [*my own translation*]. Following this idea of re-imagining L2 language teaching, the collection of articles within this volume reflects on the affordances of OER/OEP, but also highlights its pedagogical challenges and offers insight into the work that remains to be done in this field. The book has a total of 11 main chapters divided into 3 sections. The chapters are preceded by an introduction, and the concluding appendix compiles the e-resources for easy searching. The organization of this book is effectively structured according to the levels that compose the full ecosystem: (a) the microsystem is focused on the classroom in which educators and students are the main agents, (b) the mesosystem takes into consideration the institutions and communities that include language educators’ professional development, and (c) the exosystem explores ideological structures that are embraced within the L2 education field at large.

The microsystem section opens with the first chapter by Gabriela Zapata and Alessandra Ribota, “Open Educational Resources in the Heritage and L2 Spanish Classroom: Design, Development and Implementation.” The authors explore two case studies where multiliteracy pedagogies meet the incorporation of OER in two different settings: a Heritage Language Learning course at a Hispanic serving institution in California and an L2 language program at a public university in the Southern United States. Understanding these different environments, Zapata and Ribota explain the “dynamic, culturally, and historically situated practices” that each project required to meet learners’ needs when designing the OER material.

The second chapter delves into the *Cultura* project in which Sabine Levet and Stephen Tschudi describe the design of an open, innovative telecollaboration project by instructors of French at MIT. By sharing their history, they explain their open design and offer insight into the challenges they faced and how they have adapted since the project’s conception in 1997. The project’s objective, to develop the learner’s intercultural knowledge, is achieved through a synergy of pedagogy, materials development, technology, and professional development. Levet and Tschudi conclude by reflecting on the efforts required for the sustainability of the site and materials’ openness.

“Open Educational Resources as Tools to Teach the Indigenous Languages of Latin America: Where Pedagogy, Technology and Colonialism Meet” by Sergio Romero is the third chapter, delving into the design and development of OER for indigenous languages, specifically K’iche’ Mayan. Romero explains in detail the challenges faced by educators teaching and learning indigenous languages with regards to presuppositions and language ideologies directly linked to their pedagogical practices, such as the preconception that there exists a standard variety that must be taught. As Romero clearly contends, the creation and design of more OER for teaching and learning indigenous languages would benefit from the collaboration between language educators and L1 speakers’ community participation.

In the last chapter of this section, “Openness in a Crowdsourced Massive Online Language Community,” Katerina Zourou and Anthippi Potolia analyze Busuu and Duolingo, two massive online communities that merge OEP with a business model. These models incorporate commercial and financial benefits depending on the content accessible to the users. By narrating the experience of a small sample of 21 users (19 Busuu & 2 Duolingo), Zourou and Potolia examine the controversial, ethical implications of these business models that do not align with OEP, and the negative impact they have on language learners.

The three chapters in the second section deal with the existing knowledge of OER/OEP among language educators and how its inclusion could have a positive impact on the professional development training of novice L2 teachers. In the fourth chapter, Joshua Thoms and Frederick Poole provide quantitative data on a national survey of almost 1,500 language teachers across the U.S. about the use and engagement with OERs. Thoms and Poole’s analysis reveals language educators’ increased awareness and use of OERs in blended/online, K-12, and Community College teaching. Although their results are hypothesis-generating, they see a correlation between the use of OER language material and a potential pedagogical change in

language teaching.

In “Raising the Curtain on OER/OEP: Opening Pathways from Awareness to Engagement in a Graduate Course on Foreign Language Direction,” Beatrice Dupuy examines how the inclusion of an OER/OEP unit into her graduate applied linguistics course impacted students’ knowledge and awareness about the topic along with hands-on pedagogical training. This qualitative study supports the necessity of creating and/or rethinking spaces to incorporate this type of knowledge into language teachers’ pedagogical and professional development. Among the concerns listed by Dupuy, including time and quality of material, she highlights students’ agency and relevance of the importance of students becoming contributors to the OER/OEP community of practice.

In the seventh chapter, Carl Blyth, Chantelle Warner, and Joanna Luks describe the creation and origins of the Foreign Language and the Literary in the Everyday (FLLITE) initiative. This project aims to facilitate beginner language educators in the creation and incorporation of their own OERs. The chapter explores two case studies where graduate students share their experience submitting and developing their work through this project, including the reflective feedback they received, and its impact on legitimizing their role within the community.

The third section, “The Exosystem: Developing Knowledge in the Field of L2 Education,” leads with a piece by the co-editors of this journal, Dorothy Chun and Trude Heift, who explain the challenges and constraints of editing and publishing *Language Learning and Technology (LLT)* as an open-access journal. While concisely explaining the affordances of this journal, including its easy access and broad dissemination, among other factors, Chun and Heift also reflect on its financial insecurity. Against the traditional belief that print scholarship is more favorable for academic promotion, *LLT* has acquired tremendous prestige in the new language education’s open knowledge ecology.

In the next chapter, “Analysing Teachers’ Tacit Professional Knowledge of OER: The Case of Languages Open Resources Online (LORO),” Tita Beaven examines teachers’ practices when and while engaging with OERs. Beaven’s case study with language teachers at a distance-education university focuses on the tacit knowledge (i.e., pedagogical know-how) of each step of the OER lifecycle: find, compose, adapt, use, and share. She draws attention to teachers’ awareness of the support they are providing in each step, including cognitive, affective, and systemic support.

Next, the work by Rebecca Davis and Carl Blyth aims to highlight the interdisciplinary benefits that exist between language education and the Digital Humanities (DH). Modeling the parallelisms between English-language DH and foreign-language DH, Davis and Blyth encourage innumerable possibilities for collaboration. Acknowledging the disparities between English departments and foreign language departments, they describe and illustrate the features of DH pedagogy where students have an active role and are envisioned as knowledge producers.

This third section, as well as the volume itself, closes with “Finding and Using Good Stuff: Open Educational Practices for Developing Open Educational Resources” in which Christian Hilchey narrates his personal experience creating an open Czech curriculum, the *Reality Czech Project*. As an open educator, Hilchey shares his journey step-by-step, questioning the authenticity of the visual media material he was creating from a transnational lens and offering practical tips to language educators.

While explaining the successes of creation, adaptation, and/or implementation of OERs, including the financial support and labor to sustain these projects and initiatives, each research project or case study also presents the struggles and/or the challenges that need to be overcome. *Open Education and Second Language Learning and Teaching: The Rise of a New Knowledge Ecology* is highly recommended to any language educator and/or scholar as the book offers insights for both beginners and experts in OER/OEP. Beginner language educators would familiarize themselves with the meaning of Open Pedagogy within the language education field and its current research, whereas more knowledgeable specialists in the area would benefit from learning about the shared challenges to advance this pedagogical research.

This edited volume can be considered a valuable and timely contribution both theoretically and practically for drawing connections between Open Pedagogy and L2 language education fields. Considering the interconnectedness of the ecological framework presented in this volume, the same open and critical understanding and awareness should be applied to the concept of “language” within the landscape of language education. Future research that bridges Open Education and language teaching and learning must rethink concepts such as “target language” or “native language,” and incorporate practices that consider languaging at the center of their pedagogical practice (Vogel & García, 2017). As Rorabaugh (2012) points out, “both physical and digital learning spaces require us to practice a politics of teaching, whether we’re conscious of it or not” (para.1), and L2 teaching and learning is not an exception. Incorporating OEP into language teaching and learning would offer an opportunity to critically reflect upon the politics of teaching as well as the politics of language.

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About the Author

Inés Vañó García is a Ph.D. candidate in Hispanic Linguistics at The Graduate Center, CUNY. Her research focuses on the political history of the teaching of Spanish in the U.S. She holds a certificate in *Interactive Technology and Pedagogy* from the same university and serves on the editorial collective of the *Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy*.

E-mail: ivanogarcia@gradcenter.cuny.edu / vanogarcia@gmail.com