

***Social Dimensions of Autonomy in Language Learning.* Garold Murray (Ed.). Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. xi + 277 pp.**

*Reviewed by*

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Autonomous learning is often viewed as an individual act, an idea supported by Henri Holec's seminal definition of language learner autonomy: "the ability to take charge of one's learning" (1981, p. 3). However, this book takes another stance: Autonomy requires social interaction, with the focus moved to "the role of social and contextual processes" rather than individual agency (p. 135). This book is likely to appeal to a wide range of readers because it encompasses so many language learning contexts from all over the world and online and bridges both theory and practice.

The book is ordered into three sections that explore how emotions, space, and politics interact with autonomy in language learning. These sections are sandwiched between Garold Murray's informative Introduction and Conclusion, in which he draws on the literature to illustrate how proponents in the field are developing the definition of autonomy: from independence to interdependence to the inclusion of a wider social dimension.

In Part I, Christine O'Leary presents a study on strategy use and awareness raising to promote learner autonomy. She has found that learners use language learning strategies to cope with anxiety issues (p. 32). For O'Leary, autonomy is multidimensional, and there is no autonomy without social interaction. Tim Lewis also focuses on the complexity of autonomy, suggesting that unadulterated individualism is both unusual and inappropriate in society. Lewis draws on theory and research in the areas of psychology and anthropology to explore how social behavior impacts autonomous learning. Based on her study of high school students in Japan, Tomoko Yashima develops the powerful idea of autonomous dependency, in which the decision to accept advice and follow instructions may be seen as a demonstration of assertiveness and autonomy, rather than regarded as submission.

In Part II, Garold Murray, Naomi Fujishima, and Mariko Uzuka look at how social learning spaces can offer a different quality of interaction to classrooms and can encourage learners to develop their L2 identities. The writers

suggest that although autonomy comes from the individual, it can only be fostered in a space that allows freedoms not often found in a classroom. Alice Chik and Stephan Breidbach, in a cross-cultural study, discover the difficulty of agreeing on an online space in which two groups from different cultures are comfortable to share and communicate. Linda Murphy, in a chapter on distance learning, explores how technology alters the manner in which learning takes place and focuses on shifting learner identities and the relationship between learner autonomy and self-determination. Diego Mideros and Beverly-Anne Carter describe and evaluate an interdependent autonomy project in which the students in a listening class identify and recommend Spanish Youtube videos as learning materials and comment on each other's choices. They identify the various outcomes, including learner reflection on their own learning through this approach, as well as the growth that resulted from coping with the unexpected linguistic and social demands of the project.

In Part III, chapters by Liliane Assis Sade and Andy Barfield focus on ways of developing and empowering new voices. For Sade, autonomy means using "one's own voice" (p. 155), and learners are empowered by actively expressing themselves in the community. She gives insights into the nonlinear, complex nature of autonomy once its social dimension is acknowledged and explored. Barfield, reviewing the evolution of JALT's Learner Development Special Interest Group (LD SIG), looks at the creation and shaping of local learning communities of teachers. This has been achieved through the development of opportunities for shared teacher reflection and collaborative research and writing, with a deliberate positioning of teacher identities to include the status of colearners both with other teachers and with students. (Incidentally, even this book review is part of the LD SIG's collaborative, community-building ethic.) David M. Palfreyman's concern is with learners' help-seeking behavior and the ways in which sociocultural prejudices and individual feelings affect their ability to maximize their learning potential. He describes how autonomous behavior involves drawing on resources found in the local community. E. Desirée Castillo Zaragoza explores the relationship between autonomy and social class, confirms the importance of learning with a purpose, and describes the visualization of a future self helps to encourage autonomous learning. Her focus is on the ways in which a self-access center functions as a point of contact with the L2 for people from different backgrounds.

One theme running through the book is the critical importance of developing an identity or voice in the target language. Castillo Zaragoza

shows socioeconomic class to be a potentially decisive factor in creating an imagined self (p. 204). This aspect of autonomy, although individual in the sense that it is unique to one person, is undoubtedly related to interaction with other people. Murray, Fujishima, and Uzuka demonstrate the importance of having a safe and comfortable space where the learner has control (p. 91), but Yashima confirms the role of the educator as a guide because emerging L2 identities are unstable and not fully formed (p. 76). Also, it is important that learners' identities beyond that of language students are acknowledged and respected in the learning setting. As Murphy suggests, unexpected learning stemming from informal interactions is an essential part of developing an L2 identity (p. 131).

*Social Dimensions of Autonomy in Language Learning* presents persuasive arguments for viewing autonomy in language learning as innately social. This is a clear theme throughout the book, with the majority of authors using Holec (1981) as a starting point before emphasizing the importance of the social context of autonomy. Development of learner autonomy is an individual pursuit, but in the sense that it is personal, rather than in the sense that it is individualistic. Lewis sums this up well by explaining that working effectively with others does not necessitate having the same goals as they do (p. 58). In much the same way, by being anchored in such different learning settings, each individual chapter offers a fresh perspective to the message of the book as a whole. This message, expressed through the many voices and contexts, balancing theoretical discussion and reports of practice, is one that deserves the attention of all language educators who seek to increase their understanding of and support for language students' growth as autonomous learners.

## Reference

Holec, H. (1981). *Autonomy and foreign language learning*. Oxford, UK: Pergamon Press.