

Reviews

***Autonomous Language Learning With Technology: Beyond the Classroom.* Chun Lai. London, England: Bloomsbury, 2017. viii + 228 pp.**

Reviewed by

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The influence of technology on the field of language education over the past decade is undeniable, and language educators and researchers alike need to understand the nature of this influence if they are to adapt to rapidly changing educational contexts. A great deal of research in this area has focused on the use of technology in the language classroom with the goal of guiding teachers and curriculum developers as they seek to make the best use of the wide range of digital tools available. *Autonomous Language Learning With Technology Beyond the Classroom* by Chun Lai is a new volume in the “Advances in Digital Language Learning and Teaching” series edited by Michael Thomas, Mark Peterson, and Mark Warschauer that offers a thorough overview of an area that has received far less attention: the use of technology by language learners outside the classroom. The author has divided the topic of autonomous language learning with technology beyond the classroom into three parts: understanding, promoting, and researching.

In Part I, “Understanding Out-of-Class Autonomous Language Learning With Technology,” Lai begins by describing key concepts related to the themes covered in the book. Chapter 1 provides an in-depth review of the literature relevant to a discussion of autonomous language learning, including the nature, sociality, and teachability of autonomy. Rather than simply paraphrasing a list of works and schools of thought, Lai brings together various points of view into an accessible diagram (Figure 1.1) to help the reader visualize the concepts described. Of particular use to those new to this area of research is an explanation of the relationship of various related

terms connected to autonomous learning (Table 1.1), such as self-directed learning, agency, and informal learning.

After this overview of key terms, Lai moves on to related background and theory. In Chapter 2, the reader can find an extensive review of the literature at the crossroads of the fields of autonomy and technology and how they both relate to learning in general and language learning in particular. Lai sheds light on various conceptual frameworks, giving a clear explanation of each author's model or contribution to the understanding of these complex ideas. One especially topical section describes Wong's (2012) learner-centric view of mobile seamless learning, a model that seeks to categorize and explain various social, educational, and spatial factors that influence mobile-assisted learning.

For those interested in research in the current use of digital tools by learners, Chapter 3 provides a detailed overview of studies from Europe, North America, and Asia that have reported on autonomous language learning with technology outside the classroom. The studies show a wide range of types of out-of-class activities, such as watching English language movies and television programs, interacting with English speakers on social media, and using language-learning applications on mobile devices. Despite this diverse collection of data, Lai manages to identify certain trends and evaluates these trends through a theoretical framework where she seeks to define different aspects of autonomous language learning, provide guidance on effective language learning contexts, and interpret language learning environments from a sociocultural perspective. As in other chapters, Lai synthesizes the studies reviewed in a clear diagram (Figure 3.1).

Lai rounds out Part I with arguably the most important chapter of the book: "Factors that Affect Out-of-Class Autonomous Language Learning with Technology." Chapter 4 is significant not only because of its direct application for educators seeking to maximize their students' language learning outside the classroom, but also because this is the area that is most informed by Lai's own research (see Lai, 2015a; Lai, 2015b; Lai & Gu, 2011; Lai, Wang, & Lei, 2012; Lai, Zhu, & Gong, 2015), which sheds light on the role of parents and teachers in influencing students' use of digital tools outside the classroom. The first section of Chapter 4 covers internal factors that affect learners, including gender, proficiency, level, learning beliefs, and preferences. This is followed by a description of external factors, such as social influence on learners, institutional expectations, and features of technological resources available to learners. After looking at both internal and external factors, Lai covers the interplay of these two as-

pects, concluding the chapter with several more diagrams taken from her studies that help readers put together these complex factors into visual representations (see Figures 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3).

Part II, "Promoting Out-of-Class Autonomous Language Learning with Technology," covers three areas: learner training (Chapter 5), teachers' role (Chapter 6), and resource and environment design (Chapter 6). Lai begins Chapter 5 with a description of learners' own perceptions of the value of out-of-class language learning. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Lai found that learners see learning beyond the classroom as essential. However, many classroom teachers may be interested to discover it is also reported that learners generally see themselves as being primarily responsible for exploring the use of technology outside the classroom with their teachers providing support, such as recommendations and strategies for using new and effective resources. Lai moves from this realization to offer guidelines for educators who want to support autonomous learning with technology, covering different aspects of this effort as well as how these recommendations may be combined most effectively.

The teacher taking a role in autonomous learning may seem like a contradiction, but Chapter 6 lays out a process for doing just that. According to Lai's recommendations, which are drawn from a range of studies from the fields of education, technology, and language learning, teachers can use in-class curriculum, counselling, and advising to support and reinforce learners' own self-directed language study with technology. She does point out, though, that teachers themselves often create barriers to learner autonomy through their own reluctance to relinquish control. The description of a teacher's role in promoting autonomy in Chapter 7 is completed with a discussion of the resources and environment design that would best contribute to learners' autonomous language learning in Chapter 8. Chapter 7, the last chapter of Part II, may be of particular interest to educators and administrators who are setting up or attempting to improve their self-access center or multimedia library.

After the thorough overview in Part II of the topic of autonomous language learning with technology and guidelines for promoting such learning, Lai moves on to Part III, "Researching Out-of-Class Autonomous Language Learning with Technology." Chapter 8 categorizes the relevant studies that have been carried out, while also providing a framework for future research, and Chapter 9 highlights areas in need of more research. In particular, Lai points out the lack of longitudinal studies that look at changes in learners' use of digital tools over time. In addition, she claims that a deeper and

more dynamic view of learners' use of technology would provide valuable insights for the field. For example, there is a lack of research on the relationships between different technologies as used in overlapping or distinct spaces and contexts. Furthermore, researchers need to take into account the ever-shifting nature of digital resources and learners' use of them. The final chapter sums up the research landscape with one last illuminating diagram that would be of use to anyone looking to orient their next research project in this area (p. 191).

At a time when digital technology is becoming seamlessly integrated into our lives and the lives of our students, Chun Lai has provided a very thorough overview of the interaction of technology with language learners' autonomous learning along with plenty of guidance for both educators and researchers. This book will be a valuable resource for those looking to learn more about how students are making use of technology outside the classroom, as well as how educators and researchers can contribute to this important aspect of language study.

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