Book Review

Innovative Language Teaching and Learning at University: Integrating Informal Learning into Formal Language Education

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This edited book was built on the 2017 Innovative Language Teaching and Learning at University conference (InnoConf) and collected chapters with the theme: “*Integrating informal learning into formal language education*” (p. 3). Focusing on the exploration of innovative technologies for the purpose of language learning, the editors present a variety of approaches, including online courses, Wikipedia, social networking apps, online learning platforms, game-based tasks, video-based support, and Twitter. Based on the aims of the articles, the editors organized the chapters into two sections, with the first section addressing users’ feelings about these technologies and the second section addressing users’ evaluations of the technologies. The third section is an interview between the editor Tita Beaven and Richard Simcott, a founder of the Polyglot Conference. The interview emphasizes the importance of learning languages in informal ways.

The editors start the book by presenting the selection of chapters and argue that web technology and social media provide rich resources, support students both inside and outside the classroom, and engage students in finishing tasks while using authentic materials (e.g., text, audio, and video). In Section 1, Chapter 1, “Learning Collaboratively Online: Attitudes, Motivation, and Learning Communities” Bárkányi describes research on learners’ perceptions of foreign language anxiety after using open online courses. Most of the learners showed a positive attitude towards developing listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in the online course. Although the learners still maintained a high level of anxiety, the anxiety was lower compared to learning in face-to-face classrooms. In Chapter 3, Martínez-Carrasco incorporates Wikipedia in Second Language (L2) learning groups to collaboratively develop an expository text that reflects both their cultural background and identity. The students report satisfaction with the four enhanced aspects brought by wikis: motivation, socialization, command of L2, and peer scaffolding. In Chapter 4, Saona-Vallejos reports users’ opinions towards Busuu, a social networking app designed for language learning. According to the study, this app supported individual learning but not collaboration or social learning due to the lack of opportunities for interaction within the app, which did not meet the necessary features that social networking sites (SNS) should have. For example, the users commented that they were not able to find other “friends” on the app, which is completely contrary to the definition of SNS. In Chapter 5, Wang investigates learners’ use of *Tandem Language*

Exchanges, a platform aimed at building a bridge between foreign language learners and native speakers of the foreign language. Nevertheless, many participants could not attend all the meetings due to heavy workload, scheduling conflicts, and lack of ideal partners. To obtain a deeper understanding of users' experiences, Wang carried out a case study of two learners. The findings from Wang's study highlight the development of language skills as well as friendships as important features resulting from the learners' dedication of time and energy.

In Section 2, "Testing and Evaluating Language Learning Tools", the focus is on real-life related tasks with language learning. In Chapter 6, Cervi-Wilson and Brick implement a game-based learning app, *ImparApp* to practice speaking and writing skills. The learners gave positive feedback about the engagement and effectiveness of the game-based tasks. In Chapter 7, targeting listening comprehension and pronunciation, Mericka makes use of *LipDub* videos, combining lip-synching and audio dubbing for song imitation. The students enjoyed the fun brought by creating videos, expanded cultural knowledge through understanding the songs, and gained the social skill of teamwork. Chapter 8 also includes videos as a tool to enhance learning. In this chapter, Chen adopts the flipped classroom approach which introduces learning materials using videos as pre-class learning content in Mandarin teaching, including explanation videos for grammar, vocabulary, and text. According to the learners' perceptions, the use of video outside of the classroom as additional learning material was especially useful for teaching grammar rules that required explicit input. In Chapter 9, Salin investigates a project aimed at promoting students' independent learning ability, listening skills, and intercultural awareness as preparation for a learning year abroad. Students perceived it as helpful especially for "cultural preparation and language practice" (p.85). In Chapter 10, Matos concludes that the use of the videos that recorded role-play conversations was regarded as one of the best ways to learn natural language and conversations without living in the target language environment. In Chapter 11, Fernando Rosell-Aguilar summarizes the linguistic, cultural, and social benefits of using Twitter for language learning. The most salient benefits of using Twitter identified in this chapter include a collaborative community for learning, sharing, and reflecting as well as an engaging environment to increase confidence and language acquisition.

In Section 3, "The Polyglot Community: An Interview with Richard Simcott" Tita Beaven interviews Richard Simcott regarding the *InnoConf 17* conference. As a polyglot, Simcott states his experiences of learning multiple languages both in formal and informal ways, his stories of bringing up his daughter in a multilingual environment, and his efforts to hold polyglot conferences. He uses apps, like Skype and WhatsApp, which provide learners with the opportunity of immersing in the target language and culture by communicating with someone anywhere else in the world.

The chapters in the book are concisely structured, making the book easy to comprehend both by researchers and practitioners. However, this approach has limited the transparency of the research process or the methodologies used in the studies. In Chapter 9, for instance, Salin does not explicitly explain the implementation procedure of the year-abroad preparation program but only addresses the focus of the program on independent learning and cultural knowledge. Additionally, in Chapter 10, Matos fails to identify whether it was the instructional tool (videos) or the process of role play that played the most important part in enhancing pragmatics. Besides giving more explanations of research procedures, broader perceptions and more in-depth understanding of language learners' use of informal technology should be explored. For example, in Chapter 9, Salin obtains students'

perceptions of a project as preparation of an abroad year. However, an investigation of returning students who have finished the abroad year is needed to confirm the usefulness of the program.

This edited book shares new trends of technology use in a language learning context and recommends newly developed technological tools such as game based *ImparApp* and *LipDub* videos. One convincing approach for language teachers to reflect on is the use of SNS for language learning. As Saona-Vallejos argues in Chapter 4, instructors should consider whether the SNS follow the “attributes of Web 2.0 technology” (p.35) and therefore encourage and support interaction among learners or between learners and instructors. The author further criticizes the social networking app *Busuu* by pointing out that it did not fulfill the potential of SNS nor meet the requirement of 21st-century educational paradigm. *Busuu*, therefore, is making a backward move from “social to cognitive orientation, from participation to an acquisition metaphor, from L2 use to L2 learning” (p. 35), restricting the second language to one-sided learning. In addition to using SNS for learning, researchers are paying more attention to video materials, which were given highly positive feedback from students in Chapters 7, 8, and 10. This phenomenon suggested that language teachers could attempt this approach in practice to fully extend the potential of videos. Moreover, game-based learning—focusing on “the game dynamics rather than the language” (p. 55) and undertaking “activities and tasks outside the classroom walls” (p.56) — created a fun way to learn.

Despite the limitations of certain chapters, this book is beneficial for practitioners in the L2 education. One of the most intriguing arguments through the chapters is that teachers should make attempts to use informal materials for formal language learning purposes without fears though they might not be trained to use these materials. As Mericka points out in Chapter 7, “testing various methods might also help with the diversity of learners as teachers can accommodate individual needs better” (p.64). Moreover, this book highlights the need to expand the scope of language learning; formal language learning should be open to informal learning circumstances, such as learning a language while playing games and producing wiki texts outside of the classroom. Adopting digital pedagogy as an additional method to traditional teaching approaches, as Martínez-Carrasco suggested in Chapter 3, could bridge the gaps between formal and informal learning while realizing that L2 learning “needs to be approached in a comprehensive manner” (p.25).