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Online Language Teaching in Diverse Contexts (Book Review)

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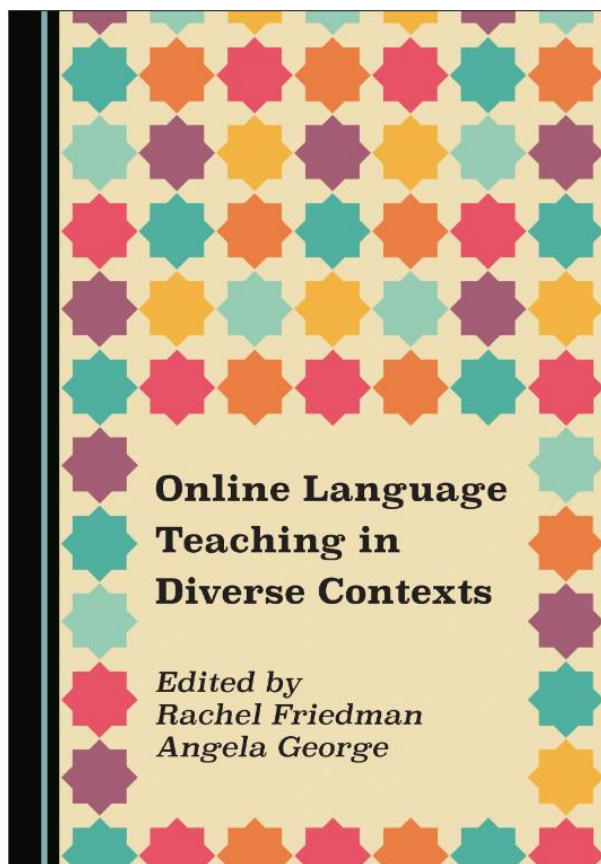
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Introduction

Beginning with COVID-19, online education has taken a pivotal role in education. This book offers some answers and insights from language instructors who have effectively implemented a range of techniques and tools to teach languages in remote and online settings. Throughout the book, the authors employed the term ‘online teaching’ to describe instruction purposefully planned and designed for the online environment, and ‘remote teaching’ to refer to the adaptation of a course to an online format, aiming to maintain the continuity of the learning experience when in-person teaching is not feasible. The first four chapters primarily delve into teaching innovations and strategies devised before the pandemic remote learning began. In contrast, the following six chapters place a greater emphasis on discussing and reflecting on developments that emerged as a result of remote learning caused by COVID-19.

Chapters

Chapter 1 “**Language Learning in Open and Participatory Digital Context**” is divided into three main sections. First, the author shares her personal experiences in online and hybrid language learning settings. Second, the chapter explores second language (L2) learning and teaching influences on the author’s perspectives and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) discourse. Finally, the author provides detailed information about the two European projects, the E-Lang Project and the E-Lang Citizen Project, in which she took active roles in implementing the procedure.

The chapter highlights the abrupt shift to online pedagogy due to the COVID-19 pandemic and underscores the importance of mastering digital literacy considering it an indispensable skill for healthy and critical interactions. The author suggests that language learning and teaching can serve as a platform to help learners become active participants in the digital realm by introducing purposeful and meaningful tasks to develop autonomy.

Finally, the author shares experiences in the two European projects: the E-Lang Project and the E-Lang Citizen Project. The former aims to empower language teachers by providing training in digital literacy in integrating technology into educational contexts. The latter introduces three primary literacies-meaning making, interaction, and technology-that are crucial for web users engaged in authentic online tasks. Both projects share a common thread of emphasizing real-world tasks as a motivating avenue to develop language competence and instill digital citizenship.

Chapter 2, **“Pedagogical Considerations for Establishing Communicative Context in Online Language Learning”** gives a brief overview of contextualized language teaching and related strategies and offers concrete pedagogical suggestions for establishing communicative context within online language learning tasks. Language educators aim to ensure that they design authentic and contextualized communicative tasks that encourage students to consider contextual clues when communicating and responding accordingly.

In the online environment, a language learner can extend their learning to the physical limitations of the class. This allows learners to engage in target tasks, authentic and meaningful tasks within an established communicative context that connects students’ learning to the real world.

Three pedagogical considerations-identifying the purpose and type of communication, contextualizing the input, and contextualizing learning tasks-should be taken into account while planning for the online environment. Creating the objectives is the initial step and these objectives must be compatible with the context and fit to the real world. In addition, contextualizing online language learning allows students to see how their learning is situated in the real world and offers them the opportunity to solve real-world problems. It increases motivation and engagement and more control over their learning process. Finally, it increases incidental learning.

Chapter 3 “**Metacognition in Online Language Learning**” is about the author’s “metacognition ecosystem” that he created for his online French courses over the years. It is claimed by the author that this ecosystem involves increased scaffolding that prompts students to behave more intentionally and guides them to consider their learning in a critical and formative light.

The author works at Kennesaw State University and conducts his lessons asynchronously and claims that “self-directed learning is a must 21st-century skill” (Escobar, 2021). He explains that his lesson objectives are proficiency-based and include integrated performance assessment (IPA). He benefits from three main websites to prepare the necessary documents for the lesson and has a self-assessment suite that consists of three assignment series during the term. These activities allow learners to express their preferences, reflect on their mid-term progress, and assess their accomplishments at the end of the course. The act of having students establish their own goals, choose strategies for attaining them, track their progress, and ultimately assess their efforts encompasses crucial elements of metacognition. That is why he uses the “ecosystem” word to define his lessons.

Chapter 4 “**A Speech Corpus Approach to Teaching French Practical Phonetics Online**” gives us information about how the author delivers his online French course using the “mirroring technique” referred to in the book as a “reflet sonore”. In the course, the author aims to improve learners’ pronunciation skills to achieve greater fluency metalinguistic awareness, and metacognition using a corpus. The content of the course is based in large part on the *Phonologie du français contemporain* (PFC) project. The corpus extracts from Detey et al, 210 and Detey et al, 2016. The principal objective of the PFC corpus is to collect data illustrating the phonetic and phonological diversity of French. This type of learning based on authentic input is crucial for developing oral communication competence.

The course promotes active, autonomous, and reflective learning as well as awareness of language variation and diversity and of crucial differences between spoken and written French. It provides culturally rich input and minimizes performance-related anxiety since students practice in private. It enhances comprehension skills and confidence in speaking and interacting with francophones. However, it has some disadvantages like being relied on technology, being labor intensive, and it requires student autonomy.

Chapter 5 “**Learning Technology Potential for UDL Integration in Online Languages Learning: Strategies and Sample Activities**” discusses the integration of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) with learning technologies in online language teaching at the university level. Three principles of UDL; engagement, representation, and action and expression allow educators to address diverse learners. To enhance equity, diversity, and inclusion UDL is now being applied to higher education. Even though it is not technology-based, since digital materials offer indispensable support for implementation, UDL is the most effective when combined with digital tools, allowing for flexible and personalized learning materials. Moreover, as learning technologies offer various media and tools to develop language skills, the use of multimedia aligns with UDL principles. Group projects and choice boards are illustrative examples of UDL integration, promoting autonomy and collaboration. As a consequence, though there are concerns about the time required for the implementation of UDL, paired with learning technologies it offers opportunities to support equity, diversity, and inclusion while accommodating diverse student needs for language instructors in an online language teaching environment.

Chapter 6 “**Online Cultural Engagement Through the Cultural Portfolio Project**” discusses the Cultural Portfolio Project, an assignment aimed at enhancing cultural learning in one university-level Arabic program, presenting the perspectives of an instructor and two former learners. Language use occurs within the cultural and social context and to participate in interactions in the target language,

understanding cultural and social dimensions of language use has a crucial significance. Therefore, cultural learning is an important part of language learning. To achieve this, the cultural portfolio project is designed and used in several Arabic courses at the university level. Having a flexible design allows adaptation to various educational contexts. It promotes active engagement, connecting students with motivations for studying Arabic and encouraging meaningful exploration of Arab cultures beyond the classroom.

During COVID-19 remote learning, with the adjustments, the project maintained its core design, and more creative online and virtual activities were included for students. Two former students shared their perspectives on how this project helped them explore the Arabic culture through online and virtual activities and promote their cultural exploration, engagement, and reflection. This proves the possibility of rich and meaningful cultural learning is possible in online and remote learning contexts allowing learners to actively shape their learning experiences.

Chapter 7 “**Reflections on Aspects of Remote Language Course Design: Adaptations to Assignment Design, Classroom Environment, and Learning Activities**” is about the experiences and reflections of a language instructor’s adaptations that she implemented in her university-level Brazilian Portuguese language courses via the *Zoom* platform. Facing the challenges of remote teaching, the instructor implemented several changes. As using online tools became a necessity during COVID-19, she started using digital tools such as; *Padlet*, *Google Docs*, and *Kahoot!*. Instead of traditional exams, final projects focused on oral skills replaced the midterm and final exams. Long essays were replaced with shorter *Padlet* entries promoting diverse and meaningful writing. To conduct in a safe and inclusive virtual environment, rules were established with students. In addition, to make the learners feel safe and support their wellbeing, remote office hours were planned and students were encouraged to attend to share their difficulties and fears during the COVID period. Those sessions helped learners not only improve their

target language but also feel more relaxed. Some asynchronous activities including pre-recorded grammar lectures and a virtual conversation exchange program were implemented to limit the time spent in front of the computer and complement synchronous learning. In addition to the resources and strategies, discussions were organized with students to support their well-being and take feedback about what works in the class and what should be improved.

Chapter 8 “**Creating a Path to Effective Online Classroom Language Teaching: Bridging SLA Theory and Practice in Korean and Japanese Classes**” highlights the effective use of online tools and diverse teaching strategies to create engaging language learning experiences through presenting two language instructors’ experiences of teaching first-year Korean and Japanese online summer courses at a Canadian university in 2020. The instructors made use of the *Zoom* platform to conduct their online lessons and utilized *Canvas* to post materials, record marks, and provide communication between students and instructors. However, the instructors adopted different ways to conduct their lessons. While Korean classes followed a flipped classroom model with both asynchronous and synchronous sessions, Japanese classes relied solely on synchronous sessions. To conduct communicative activities, utilize authentic materials, create a positive atmosphere, and provide feedback *Zoom* features such as online whiteboard and annotation functions, break-out rooms, and chat were used. In addition, the instructors used a group project and individual projects in their online courses. The assessment included a mix of formative and summative methods, such as quizzes, tests, and a final project.

Chapter 9 “**The Impact of the Shift to Remote Learning on Collaborative Experiential Learning Projects in Spanish and Italian Language Courses**” explores the impact of the shift from in-person to remote learning environments on collaborative experiential learning projects in novice and intermediate courses in Italian and Spanish. The researchers conducted surveys before and after the COVID-19 pandemic to compare reflections of students who experienced both face-to-face and remote learning. For

Italian courses, conducting lessons in the virtual environment, through *Zoom*, was challenging yet resulted in positive outcomes. The survey distributed at the end of the semester yielded positive results. Students commented on the importance of collaboration when completing the assignment, how the project provided students with a welcoming space for learning the language, and how it encouraged the creation of a community of learners online. In addition, these kinds of tasks proved to be a positive experience for the learners once they overcame the initial obstacles.

Spanish courses, before the pandemic, used to include virtual meetings with learners of Spanish from two other universities in North America. The students commented on how useful having online meetings with peers from native speakers is in improving their speaking skills, building a community, improving self-confidence, and the relaxed and comfortable atmosphere of the virtual classes. During the pandemic, the virtual assignment was very similar to the previously held one. Students in the course were involved with collaborative experiential learning consisting of mini-group projects completed during class time. These activities helped learners enhance their self-confidence in using the target language, increase in learners' comfort level while using the target language, and a newfound sense of community. Furthermore, these activities allowed learners to think and create in the target language in a safe environment where they did not feel judged. Overall, open-ended, low-stakes collaborative activities benefitted students in both online and in-person settings, fostering language skills and a sense of community.

Chapter 10 “**Pandemic-Motivated Transformations: Comprehensible-Input Oriented Pedagogy in Beginning Spanish Online-Course Design**” outlines the redesign of two large-scale Spanish language programs and one smaller-scale program with a combined student enrollment of over 8000 students annually. The focus is on transitioning from input to output sequences in online settings, emphasizing processing-oriented activities and meaning-based interactive tasks between students and professors, as well as peer-to-peer interactions. In online delivery, input-based activities have advantages over in-person

classes such as asynchronous completion at the learners' convenience, multiple submissions, and immediate feedback. For lower-level learners, with input-based activities grammar instructions can be delivered through asynchronous sessions. These sessions will allow learners to listen to them multiple times, rewind, pause, and engage with other sources (i.e., textbooks, and webpages) while completing the grammar tutorials.

In addition to the comprehensible input, at some points in the syllabus, students need opportunities to express themselves in the L2. Tasks include some sort of tangible meaning-based outcome utilizing the information exchanged during the process of their completion. Therefore; completion of tasks in either written or oral forms can facilitate the ways to provide the opportunity with the learners. The researchers created many interactive tasks moving from input to output sequence by simply modifying existing curricular materials to fit the current situations as a consequence of the pandemic, to evolve the landscape of teaching and learning Spanish. These tasks can provide learners with the linguistic tools needed to broach subjects such as news sources, social justice, immigration reform, and other emerging topics. Finally, while implementing the online lessons, the researcher took into consideration a few things. First, whether students should be required to have their cameras on during class. Second, students' internet reliability, speed, and bandwidth. Considering these, the classes were divided into two groups, and class time was reduced as each group met for 35 minutes twice a week and 200 minutes three times a week, respectively. These sessions are dedicated solely to doing interactive tasks.

Evaluation

This book can be an invaluable source for instructors who have doubts about implementing online, remote lessons. The chapters share several language teachers' experiences of online teaching pre and during the pandemic. The learners can benefit from the book in terms of how to redesign their courses in case of a necessity and improve their online learning tools to integrate their language teaching

environment. It offers valuable insights and strategies from language instructors who have successfully adapted to teaching in the digital age, especially in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This book will be a valuable resource for practitioners and learners seeking deeper comprehension of the diverse practices and methods applicable to online language teaching as online language course offerings continue to grow and develop.

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