Preface

Technology innovation has always been interrelated with human language evolution. From the most ancient clay tablets to the most current digital tablets, new technology has always empowered language communication and shaped culture. We can still examine today how innovative technologies can be adopted and advance their pedagogy and promote student learning.

Focusing on the current trends in digital technology and diversity within language education, this book overview echoes issues addressed in the introduction, while providing a global picture-of the highlights of the latest research in foreign language education in the digital age.

Section 1: Commentary

Opening with Chapter 1, “Reflection: How Now Shapes the Future – Emerging Trends from the Less Commonly Taught Languages Trenches,” Dr. Jacques du Plessis proclaims a message centered on the world’s responsibility to protect and foster the teaching of endangered languages. As President of the National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTL), Dr. du Plessis shares his commentary upon and expertise about the challenges in the field of LCTL, in particular the case of Afrikaans. He cites some of the challenges for LCTL include budget problems and enrollment, which prevent adequate support for these languages in a digitalized world. He similarly calls on the community of language educators to engage in cross-collaboration and come up with solutions to counter the challenges facing LCTL programs, such as novel manners by which to world-connect online classes in a manner that promotes financial sustainability within these programs.

Given that all languages matter and reflect human heritage and identity, and further given that digital technology provide platforms, modes, and opportunities to engage in language practice, the chapters following Dr. du Plessis’ provide a holistic and comprehensive review of current research and innovative pedagogy, trends, models, and approaches from multidisciplinary global perspectives, by which to engage with these issues. The chapters are grouped together in four categories: Technologies across Continents, Web Collaboration across Languages, Less Commonly Taught Languages, and Teacher Education and Learning Strategies.

Section 2: Technologies across Continents

In Chapter 2, “The Structural and Dialogic Aspects of Language Massive Open Online Courses (LMOOCs): A Case Study,” Carolin Fuch provides an overview of the literature about the structural formats and interactive nature of LMOOCs as they engage with the learning process. This study of LMOOC satisfaction,
which is based upon content, materials, and procedures, provides information about learner motivation for completing LMOOC courses.

Chapter 3, “Mind Your Hashtags: A Sociopragmatic Study of Student Interpretations of French Native Speakers’ Tweets,” explores how social media such as Twitter is utilized in French language learning. Gerladine Blattner, Amanda Dalola, and Lara Lomicka, by means of a learner analysis of hashtags, examine how the use of the popular microblogger’s metadata aggregator can be utilized to enhance second language multiliteracy and better promote online communication.

Chapter 4, “Challenges and Perspectives of Language Education Technology in Brazil: From Confronting Native Language Loss to Implementing EFL Classes,” explores how Portuguese, the official language of Brazil, and English as a Foreign Language (EFL), continue to dominate language study in the South American country. Eliane Thames Bodah, Josh Meuth Alldredge, Brian William Bodah, Alcindo Neckel, and Emanuelle Goellner explore the uneven development of language study, acquisition, and development in Brazilian schools, and the challenge they face to integrate innovative technologies into language education. The authors examine how and why the educational institutions and teachers in Brazil continue to lag behind the pace of innovation.

For Foreign Language teachers who are not familiar with flipped and hybrid classroom, Clara Burgo in Chapter 5, “Teaching Spanish in the Digital Age: A Flipped Classroom or Just Hybrid?”, provides a detailed overview of how these models can be employed to support in-class and outside-class support. She highlights the relative advantages and disadvantages of both flipped and hybrid classrooms, as well as provides recommendations for these two models’ general pedagogical application and potential for improvement.

After discussing how technologies are used to facilitate a variety of alphabetical languages, authors Baily Li, Sijia Yao, and Wei Hong disclose the difficulties in applying an online format to non-alphabetical language courses. Chapter 6, “Beginning Chinese Foreign Language Online Course Design: Utilizing Multiple Digital Modes and Assessments,” provides a thorough review of attempts to develop asynchronous and synchronous Chinese Foreign Language course design. They include a catalogue of challenges such as teaching logograph symbols, and discuss ways of engaging students with motivating multimedia materials. This information may prove beneficial and inspirational for instructors of eastern Asian languages, who may be considering developing their own web-based courses.

Section 3: Web Collaboration across Languages

The third section includes information about various types of web collaboration across different languages, such as Spanish, English, French, and Chinese. In recent years, web-based informal language learning environments have become more popular in regions such as Europe, which promote plurilingual approaches and methods. This new technological trend is drawing more attention towards less orthodox methods and approaches towards bridging language knowledge, and towards valuing prior language knowledge.

One of these less orthodox methods is the focus of Chapter 7, entitled “Creating a Micro-Immersion Environment through Telecollaboration.” The micro-immersion environment in question provides an innovative approach that connect peers authentically in “real” time for virtual target language practice. Author Tasha Lewis provides detailed background about the benefits of virtual language exchange. In her study, native speakers of Spanish and English exchange languages while collaborating on mutual activities that benefit language development.
Chapter 8, “Developing Key Competences for Life-Long Learning in Online Collaboration: Teaching ICT in English as a Medium of Instruction,” provides a basis for understanding how key competences benefit student learning. Margarita Vinagre explains how a blended learning environment that focuses on inquiry-based learning about information and communication technologies, such as wiki designed instruction, promote greater foreign language facilitated learning for undergraduate students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

Foreign language and plurilingual language learning that is supported through online collaboration, wikis, and chats, allow learners to utilize prior language knowledge. As such, Chapter 9, “Translanguaging in Multilingual Chat Interaction: Opportunities for Intercomprehension between Romance Languages”, challenges researchers and educators alike to look outside of traditional learning boxes. Silvia Melo-Pfeifer describes how intercomprehension can occur when language learners engage in collaborative multilingual practice. Her study reveals how language users achieve meaning through the use of typologically related languages and other semiotic resources, and then transfer these similarities of knowledge towards the new languages that are being learned. Contrary to a monoglossic orientation, this research approach addresses how prior language knowledge can benefit learning in a plurilingual context online.

Chapter 10, “French-Chinese Dialogical Interaction via Web Collaborative Blog-Writing: Code-Switching to Extend Online Tandem Language Learning”, is a translated chapter from French and Chinese into English by the research team. In this study, Ya Rao, Congcong Wang and Jacob Bender, in an effort to promote online tandem language learning, discuss a web-based blog-writing program for French Foreign Language learners in China, and a corresponding program for Chinese Foreign Language learners in France. The program provides a space for understanding metalinguistic awareness, plurilingual competence, and the bilingual skills that learners use to facilitate foreign language learning and intercultural communication. This chapter possesses broad implications for teachers who plan to design similar programs for extending students’ language learning through web collaboration.

Section 4: Less Commonly Taught Languages

This section commemorates all of the instructors and professors involved in language fields across the world to retain these invaluable but often endangered/marginalized languages. Challenges in the maintenance, preservation, and the practice of languages such as Yiddish, Korean, and Arabic are illustrated. Also in this section, readers can ponder and reflect on the issues and approaches that best support LCTL speakers and children in our global community.

Chapter 11 begins with a historical review of the Yiddish language, providing the reader with information and statistics about a language considered by many to be dying. However, as Agi Legutko points out in “Yiddish in the 21st Century: New Media to the Rescue of Endangered Languages,” that this language has re-emerged and been revitalized on social network sites. The author provides an overview and background of Yiddish language use, some of the challenges it currently faces, and the ways in which Yiddish is being revived through online interactions. The author discusses how Yiddish can be revitalized on campuses as a LCTL.

Another less commonly taught language is Korean, which is not widely offered outside of Asian countries. Nevertheless, LCTL language Korean language use has risen in popularity lately due to the Korean-wave, or K-wave, of dramas and songs enjoyed and consumed by fans globally. Byung-jin Lim and Danielle Pyun contribute to the primary research about “Korean Foreign Language Learning: Videoconferencing with Native Speakers.” Chapter 12 emphasizes how synchronous real-time video-chat
with native Korean speakers from a South Korean college helped American students develop linguistic and intercultural communicative competence in Korean.

Another LCTL that is often associated with more gross misconceptions than most is Arabic. In Chapter 13, Sawsan Abbadi addresses “Globalization and Possibilities for Intercultural Awareness: Multimodal Arabic Culture Portfolios at a Catholic University.” The author had students develop and co-construct multi-modal culture portfolios that promoted opportunities that promoted greater understanding of the Arabic language and culture among diverse high school learners.

Section 5: Teacher Education and Learning Strategies

What are the types of approaches that teachers can employ to help language learners’ progress in targeted language study? How can instructors also promote language heritage pride and identity? The challenges of teacher education and the types of strategies utilized to bridge linguistic, cultural, and other borders are addressed in this section. In this section, we find that, from heritage language learners in France to heritage language learners in the United States and China, all benefit from culturally responsive and technological approaches that support their learning and language development.

We see these mutual benefits illustrated in Chapter 14, wherein Latisha Mary and Andrea Young detail “The Role of Multimedia in Expanding Pre-Service Teachers’ Understanding of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Classrooms and Furthering their Professional Identities.” This study explores how multimedia can be utilized to promote greater empathy toward a diverse array of students’ heritages.

Moreover, Chapter 15, “Investigating Mobile Assisted English Foreign Language Teaching and Learning in China: Issues, Attitudes and Perceptions”, investigates how English Foreign Language (EFL) teachers and students in China spontaneously use smartphone apps to support their informal language learning. Among other findings, Haizia Liu, Wenhao Tao, and William Cain find no significant difference in teacher-student choice of apps. Rather, in the use of app-assisted learning, what turns out to be most useful is how students expect guidance from teachers. The authors also explore the tensions between student self-discipline concerning the use of mobile devices and the teachers’ desires to maintain positive attitudes towards the informal application of new technologies.

Closer to home, heritage language learners, such as Mexican English Language Learners in the United States, need to be provided with authentic opportunities to interact with English-speaking peers outside academic environments. In Chapter 16, “Mexican Heritage ELL and Native Speaker Interaction: A Case Study of Tandem Language Learning Strategies”, Lisa Winstead provides a basis for analyzing the tandem language strategies used by peer learners to teach and learn language from one another. Findings from a transcription analysis of 12 English and Spanish videotaped sessions indicate that tandem language learning not only provides a space for language learners to engage in plural strategies to promote teaching and learning, but also learner metacognition, particularly when peer learners employ interlingual and plurilingual measures to compensate for language gaps.

With a similar interest in tandem language learning, Chapter 17, “The Impact of Blog Peer Feedback on Improving Iranian English Foreign Language Students’ Writing”, adopts a quantitative method to investigate (a) whether using blog peer feedbacks have any statistically significant effect on improving Iranian students’ EFL writing skill, and (b) whether participants at different proficiency levels react differently to blog peer feedbacks, as far as their writing improvement is concerned. Mohsen Shahrokhi and Shima Taheri indicate that using blog peer feedback can have a statistically significant impact upon improving the writing skills of EFL learners.
From the various studies and chapters available within this book, we hope to be able to highlight both the challenges and opportunities afforded by emerging and new technologies within the ever-changing field of second-language acquisition studies. We likewise hope that the reader, whether they are an instructor or a researcher, may be able to glean fresh and innovative insights for navigating the ever-fraught world of foreign language instruction, no matter what situation they may be in, or whatever their circumstances may be.

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