Foreword

Information and communication technology (ICT), formerly referred to as information technology (IT), is now common as digital technology. It provides access to information through telecommunication. Although ICT is similar to IT, its primary focus is on communicative technology. Synchronous and asynchronous communication modes have provided food for thought in academia for years. The omnipresence of modern ICTs including the Internet, cell phones, social media, and other communicative channels have created new conditions and environments to learn foreign languages quickly and easily inside and outside the classroom. The book “Enhancement and Limitations to ICT-based Informal Language Learning” is the product of authors, editors, reviewers, and advisory editorial board who are all well-suited to tackle its subject-matter – as they are educators with myriad international experiences in the field of learning and teaching English as a second language.

This publication draws chiefly on two learning paradigms: technology-enhanced learning (TELL) and informal language learning. It overthrows the hegemony of formalized learning and hails informal learning as a patent part of humankind, while also focusing on informal learning under the aegis of digital technologies. It accounts for the implications of shortening the distance between formal and informal learning of English as a second language (L2). In fact, using ICT in formal language learning is no novelty as it has been in use since the inception of early CALL in the 1960s – the period during which technologies were employed in systematic and planned ways to facilitate learning mechanism in formal education. Later on, advances in digital ICTs gave way to new learning settings, opportunities, strategies, and inducement. Advances in learning and teaching paradigms and technological innovations reciprocally allowed social and collaborative learning in face-to-face settings as well as in non-administered situations, largely in virtual spaces. This book is centered on this latter learning mode. It rests on the merits of informal language learning and it minimizes the hoopla that surrounds classroom learning. It builds–through digital technology– a bridge between formal and informal learning. The mission of the book is to support a balanced and flexible learning environment in lieu of the long-established formal education confinements.
The book contains two sections: theoretical accounts and empirical studies. Whereas the former comprises the first three chapters that lay the theoretical background of the book, the latter compiles evidence of learning with ICT in informal situations. All chapters were written with an awareness that they will be especially useful for pedagogues, researchers and teachers who are interested in L2 learning and teaching, CALL, TESOL, and education. The chapters have profound implications for L2 pedagogy (English is a working example). They exhibit how learners manipulate accessible ICTs to enhance their learning of English beyond the traditional classroom. By suggesting how to apply methods and techniques of learning language in an informal manner, the audience of the book will be able to enhance formal English by making informal decisions and better choices on the basis of the research findings delineated in the chapters.

The book is indeed an important addition to the existing scholarly works in the area of TELL. One important issue the book has taken up is that the advent of digital technology has given English a new status. English has become the mother-tongue of online communities because many ICT users communicate through English. That is, English is not exclusively taught through books in schools and universities to non-English speakers. The traditional classification of English as English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) has been subsided partially due to this worldwide electronic usage of the language. By using English online or through ICT applications or games, users are exposed to varieties of English, not only the standard British or American varieties. World Englishes and English as a lingua franca (ELF) have become common in virtual spaces where learners spend much of their time connected to technological innovations. Hence, it seems awkward to stick to the old classifications of English when discussing new technological advances that have facilitated and shaped new approaches to language learning and teaching, and overall new ways of thinking. Furthermore, the book brings to the foreground a multiple-method approach to assess informal language intake. It pinpoints that language assessment formats such as multiple-choice questions and matching activities in the form of quizzes, midterms or final examinations are less suitable to evaluate informal language learning that results from spontaneous uses of ICTs. Alternative assessment tools may be adopted instead with a range of evaluation tools: quizzes, concept mapping, peer review, portfolios, performance assessment, reflective writing and media creation, rubrics, interviews, observations, and self-reporting. These alternative assessment tools enable learners to have a say in what they learn. They become able to determine their learning objectives independently from formal authorities, entrenching learning with elements of autonomy and learner-centeredness.

Touching on the above, the book presents highly-readable and well-organized, insightful ideas to re-orient English language teaching in the international context.
Chapter 1
Informal language Practices via Digital Technology:
The Neglected Proficiency

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ABSTRACT

The main contention of this chapter is to dig into ICT-based serendipitous activities that second language (L2) learners perform beyond formal curriculum. It is based on an idea that juxtaposition of formal and informal language learning, under the auspices of ICT, broadens the ecology of learning and thus contributes to learners’ overall proficiency. Nevertheless, formal language learning continues to be disconnected from practices that take place outside the classroom in hyperspaces, and the language uptake obtained from informal electronic involvement generally goes unnoticed. The chapter undertakes this missing proficiency and suggests implications to bridge or at least narrow the gap between formal and informal learning. It familiarizes teachers, parents, and course designers with today’s learners’ experiences of learning that occur after structured lessons. It implies that informal ICT-enabled practices should be fostered as supplementary and complementary to the formal instruction.

INTRODUCTION

Digital technology, which has become mainstream in modern life, has enlivened foreign language learning, making it cross barriers of the classroom and intertwine with informal learning. It has given language learners various and intriguing ways

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to acquire the target language in ways never attained before the emergence of sophisticated gadgets such as laptops, tablets, mobile phones, iPod, and an array of Web-based tools and applications. A large percentage of today’s learners spend most of their lives connected to such electronic devices (Godwin-Jones, 2019; Ibrahim, 2018; Jarvis, 2014). The current generation of technology users, or as Jarvis dubbed the ‘digital residents,’ seem to digitize most aspects of their life, including second language (L2) learning. Since students’ lives are permeated by a wide range of timely resources of information and communication technology (ICT), these ‘digital residents’ spend part of their lives performing ICT-based activities (Jarvis, 2014). They reside in cyberspace beyond formal learning contexts. Technology has saturated their lives and become a part of who and what they are (Godwin-Jones, 2018; Lee & Kim, 2014). Travis and Joseph (2009) noted that ICT empowers language learners to partake in virtual communication outside of class time; it has led to a diminution in their participation in formal education (Godwin-Jones, 2019). Arguably, the availability and diversity of such ICTs individualize practices – allowing users to manage learning activities by choosing the materials, time, and places of their study (Hegelheimer & O’Bryan, 2009). That is, the digital technology breakthroughs have spawned new opportunities of self-directing learning; learners self-monitor their learning, independently from the confinements of formal teaching (Bonk & Lee, 2017; Godwin-Jones, 2019; Lai, 2017).

Nevertheless, some researchers contend that the availability of ICTs does not mean that learners always embrace these learning opportunities. Carrying hand-held devices does not ensure that each of these technologies is used to the best effect (Levy, 2009). For instance, YouTube and Facebook which have matured into common sources for educational content are still a topic of controversy. Jarvis (2014) found that the participants in his study used ICT not to practice English explicitly but to perform free activities such as posting on Facebook, commenting on other users’ posting or status and watching videos on YouTube. Similarly, Isbell (2018) found that there is little recognition of language learning activities in online spaces where language is the primary focus. The author argued that surfing the Internet for a general learning purpose does not automatically amount to what Krashen (2009) termed ‘comprehensible input’. In the same vein, Lee (2019) alleged that L2 vocabulary development does not stem from simply placing learning in a technology-rich learning environment. It is in this spirit of query, the chapter considers the wider ‘ecology’ of learning, looking beyond what formal education offers. It hones in on the content of L2 learners’ indulgence in electronic consumption and the relevance of this engagement to their English performance.
Informal language Practices via Digital Technology

Rationale

Being a global contact language, English is often mediated through digital devices. English learners work on computers and mobile devices without the presence of teachers, or even without teachers’ acquaintance with the electronic involvement that their learners are involved in. In some cases, ICTs may be the only medium of contact beyond the classroom (Jarvis, 2014). In the literature, the frequency of student-initiated ICT-based English activities is under researched (Ibrahim, 2013). Available studies on this theme reported that using technology in the classroom incentivizes students to continue learning beyond the teaching limited time and defined settings (Garrett, 2009; Isbell, 2018; Pereira, Fillol & Moura, 2019). Gonzalez and Louis (2013) provided an impulse to explicate how learners perform activities after school and how these activities contribute to their overall academic achievements.

The idea of this chapter stemmed from a line of prior research that called for informal learning (Alm, 2015; Al-Kadi, 2018; Brebera & Hlouskova, 2012; Chen & Bryer, 2012; Christine & Cathy, 2016; Lee, 2019; Trinder, 2017; Wang & Heffernan, 2009). These studies are based on a seemingly simple premise that digital ICTs allow L2 learners a wide variety of individual initiative that supports formal instruction. This work is also in congruence with Sharples, Arnedillo-Sanchez, Milrad, Vavoula’s (2009) view that ICTs facilitate the interaction that people endure “with their surroundings, peers, and technology to create impromptu sites of learning and to carry their conversations from place to place, from time to time, from topic to topic” (p. 233). This bountiful research generally shows that students, when using digital technology, make general uses of it. Such studies simply scratched the surface of the phenomenon by touching on general uses of ICTs. The majority of prior research did not delve into measuring the informal learning outcomes. Using ICTs in sophisticated ways that pedagogues may value is still limited to a small percentage of learners (Chun, Kern & Smith, 2016; Godwin-Jones, 2018; Jarvis, 2014; Rogers, 2008; Sefton-Green, 2004; Trinder, 2017). The benefits, as well as challenges of appropriating ICT in everyday use for language learning, have not been well-explored, leaving wider room for research to explore uncharted areas. Informal technology-mediated exposure to English, which mostly goes unnoticed, is an ongoing heated debate. The putative value of informal learning must be weighed and assessed.

This is a point of departure to (a) dig into whether L2 learners have laudable informal ICT-based chances for L2 exposure beyond formally-structured learning and (b) elucidate the relevance of this informal learning to their overall performance. The chapter undertakes the issue of informal English practices through proliferate uses of modern digital tools and applications in a range of informal settings. For a better understanding, this endeavor deconstructs the topic into the following questions: In