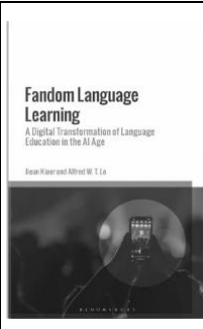


Fandom Language Learning: A Digital Transformation of Language Education in the AI Age

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Fandom Language Learning: A Digital Transformation of Language Education in the AI Age			
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As learning is in part driven by individual interest (Hidi & Renninger, 2019), including language learning (Tin, 2013), it is crucial that teachers support students' interests in the classroom. However, since students' interests invariably differ with some having very specific, niche interests, and others having popular ones, how can teachers bridge the gap to incorporate diverse student interests into the classroom?

Outside the classroom, students could learn the language they are taught at school through personal interests, particularly since the advent of the internet. The participatory and connective nature of online spaces allows students to interact with their domain of interest through forums, social media, and fandoms. Learners can acquire L2 proficiency through authentic communication and shared enthusiasm of a particular topic. Language learning in this way is emergent in the sense that since there is no single learning approach that can facilitate diverse students' needs, they can explore topics, resources, and modalities based on personal interests. However, it is also because of this unstructured mechanism that such mode of learning has often been dismissed in the professional and academic discourse as being unserious, unsystematic, and lacking the formal structure of traditional learning programs (Werner & Tegge, 2020). Nevertheless, learners who engage with their interests often demonstrate greater motivation and success in language learning (Murray, 2008). Yet research on language learning through online fandoms remains scant aside from the use of social media platforms and online resources intentionally designed to facilitate language learning.

This is the lacuna Jieun Kiaer and Alfred Weng Tat Lo address in their book, *Fandom Language Learning: A Digital Transformation of Language Education in the AI Age* by

examining how fandom, i.e., an online community built around shared enthusiasm of a particular topic, can facilitate language learning. The authors explore how participation in fandom activities can enhance language learning and how teachers can incorporate aspects of fandom into their language classroom using emerging technologies, including generative AI.

The book comprises eight chapters akin to a coursebook with learning objectives. Chapter 1 is an overview of the relations between fandom and language learning. In Chapter 2, the discussion shifts to the technologies enabling the birth of online fandoms. A summary of web paradigms and their relation to language learning is presented. The authors include niche topics such as blockchain and NFTs (non-fungible tokens). Chapter 3 goes into the micro dimension of language learning (Douglas Fir Group, 2016) by discussing psychological aspects of fandom language learning (FLL). Unsurprisingly, motivation and positive affect enhance language learning.

Moving away from the micro dimensions, Chapter 4 discusses technology enabled fandom communities of practice (fCoP). The macro-level intersection between fandom, ideology, capital, and investment are discussed and illustrated with case studies for interested readers. The topic of language use is explicated further in Chapter 5 on translanguaging. Aside from a discussion of spontaneous translanguaging, a noteworthy section is the encouragement that language learning should move beyond traditional linguistic boundaries. This, as argued, would enable students to utilize their full semiotic and linguistic repertoires by incorporating both L1 and L2 without constraint of traditional notions of language use. Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 address this issue by examining how AI solutions can respond to students' diverse interests and support more flexible, interest-driven forms of language learning. Potential AI uses for personalized language learning are presented, e.g. AI avatars and VR (virtual reality). The book concludes with practical tips for language teachers to implement, ranging from lesson planning to the nurturing of fCoP at school.

The book is a valuable introduction to the contemporary landscape of language learning. FLL is a nascent field of study that intersects with interest studies, particularly online affinity networks (Ito et al., 2019). However, research on similar topics has focused primarily on popular culture (Murray, 2008; Werner & Tegge, 2020), with limited research directly addressing fandoms. The contribution of this book to the growing literature should be celebrated to move the conversation beyond the classroom vs. informal learning divide. The authors argue convincingly that classroom learning could be enhanced by incorporating fandom. The book's practical strength lies in its hands-on approach and illustrative examples of learning materials and tasks, which teachers can draw on to adapt and construct their own classroom language learning activities. AI is proposed as a solution to bridge the gap between student interest and learning; these include AI enabled content, personalized learning, and personalized AI fandom.

However, several aspects of the book warrant careful consideration. Most notable is its rather uncritical discussion of blockchain and NFTs. While these technologies could theoretically facilitate innovation in education, their main usage has been in cryptocurrency. No tangible pedagogical application is presented besides the transactional aspect of the technology. As such, it is important that teachers help students discern between cultural consumerism (as well as outright scams) and meaningful cultural engagement. Teachers should maintain a critical stance when adopting technological trends to avoid blindly chasing the next big technology bubble. While the prospect of AI avatars and VR introduce exciting possibilities, it might overlook the disparities of technological access at global scale. The initial investment of VR gear alone might be cost prohibitive. In this regard, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) could be a practical alternative.

Moreover, the structure of exemplified tasks resembles traditional modes of instruction, e.g., reading text followed by comprehension questions, the novel addition being that task content is based on students' fandom interest. In principle, the pedagogical resourcefulness of teachers could be enhanced with AI assistance beyond content modification; I would argue that this aspect, i.e., how to adapt and create learning activities, has been minimally discussed in the book.

Notwithstanding its limitations, the book stands out as a reminder that language learning should be joyful. While fandom interaction is inherently different from traditional classroom interaction, such difference is needed to move language learning discourse forward. Ultimately, this is what the book is trying to convey, that is, to think that language learning can happen through online community engagement and to guide each student's differing passions. By showcasing how AI-supported practices can be integrated into the classroom, the book challenges the common assumption that formal classroom learning, and informal learning must remain separate. The authors have illustrated and argued how FLL can develop organically beyond formal instruction, therefore providing a wealth of language learning opportunities if managed well. The remaining challenge, then, lies with individual teachers in that we should harness AI potentials within our own teaching contexts to make learning relevant, joyful, and meaningful. As such, the book is likely to be of interest to language teachers across educational levels, particularly those who work with learners already engaged with digital media and online communities.

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