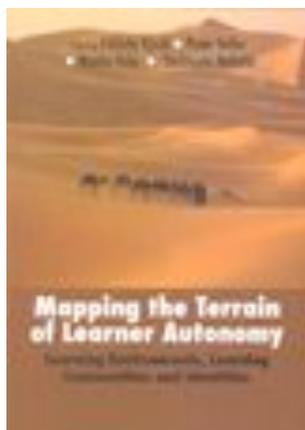


Review: Ellen Head

Mapping the Terrain of Learner Autonomy, by Felicity Kjisik, Peter Voller, Naoko Aoki and Yoshiyuki Nakata



自律学習研究領域を
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後者は学習者の「自律」を目的としている。本書ではこの両者の素晴らしい例を読むことができる。さらに、日本の教育制度における自律学習の現状を概説している中田の論文は、残念ながら、学習者および教師の自律は日本の教育制度において必要なものであるが実現からはほど遠いものだと唱えている。そして、青木の刺激的な論文は自律学習研究のさらなる発展のため、学習を支える社会文脈の条件を談話分析等のミクロレベルやエスノグラフィー調査や縦断的研究等を含むメゾレベル、社会文化的なマクロレベル、など様々なレベルの研究を全て考慮する必要性を訴えている。

Mapping the Terrain of Learner Autonomy came into being “to initiate Japanese language speaking teachers into the field” and “to have a vision for the future” of where learner autonomy studies might be heading. (p.7) The book, published in both English and Japanese, was the result of conversations between the editors at the 2007 ILA conference at Kanda University, Tokyo. Some of the papers are very close to the papers given at the conference, while others, like Aoki’s and Nakata’s, have been written subsequently for the book. It struck me as somewhat ambitious to expect the same volume to provide an orientation for those new to autonomy studies and a challenge to those who have been in the field for some time, but in effect the book succeeds in fulfilling both functions. It is divided into four sections, “Looking back and taking stock”, “Examples”, “Advisor, counsellor and teacher development” and “Looking ahead”..

The book brings together accounts of learning in widely different settings, and this tension is one of the principle themes of the book. Holec introduces a distinction between what he calls “state 1”, instruction-based learning, and “state 2”, non-instruction-based, learning programs.

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Mapping the Terrain of Learner Autonomy (「自律学習研究領域を描く」)は自律学習研究分野に新たに興味を持った読者に対しては導入の手引書となり、この分野に精通している読者に対しては新しい研究の方向性を示唆してくれるという貴重な書籍である。この本は2007年に神田外語大学で開催されたILAでの筆者らのディスカッションからアイデアが生まれ、出版に至ったものである。この一冊の中に集められた大きく異なった学習環境における実践研究に共通するテーマの一つはテンション(緊張関係)であり、次の4セクションで構成されている。「自律学習研究の歴史の振り返りそして評価」、「自律学習実践例」、「アドバイザー、カウンセラー、教員支援活動」そして「自律学習研究の今後について」。この本は1970年代に学習者オートノミーを世に知らしめてくれた研究者Holecによる論文により始まる。Holecによると学習は教師による指導による学習(大抵は教室内)と、指導に頼らない学習プログラム(教室外)に分けることが出来る。前者の目的は学習者の「独立心の確立」としており、

Personally, I find this division somewhat artificial, particularly when Holec goes on to say that the aim of “state 1” education is “to increase the learners’ responsibility...producing independent learners” in contrast to “state 2” which aims “to produce autonomous learners”. I feel that now that Japan has some universities, such as Kanda University of International Studies and Akita University, which are committed to “state 2” style programs, there is great potential in opening up dialogue between those engaged in language advising and those working in a classroom setting. I wonder if such dialogue can best be facilitated by concentrating on what separates us rather than looking at the continuity between the aims. To do him justice, Holec does provide an excellent and detailed account of aspects of implementation of “state 2”, with some stimulating suggestions for learner training and teacher training, all of which I would suggest are also relevant to “state 1”. He makes the point that learners often conceive goals in terms of materials and can benefit from interaction with an advisor who helps them to interpret their goals in relation to activities and skills. He also provides a lovely new metaphor: “rigging”: “in non-instructed learning, the help received may best be described as not so much of the scaffolding type as of the rigging type: its objective is equipping learners with the knowledge that they require to fulfill their decision making needs.” (p.29). As a metaphor, rigging, i.e., the ropes and connections needed to extend the sails of a boat and position them to catch the wind, suggests that learning is a voyage and the learner is moving forward like a boat, carrying not only the equipment but the ability to adjust the equipment.

In the second section of the book, “Examples”, there are three case-studies: Little, focusing on the European Language Portfolio in Ireland, Schwienhorst, contrasting a successful

and an unsuccessful implementation of autonomy in a computer based course, and Murray, describing a “learning structure” which forms the basis of study in a self-access environment at Akita University. I found Schwienhorst’s paper refreshing as he challenges some entrenched assumptions: “Why do publications speak of CALL but not book-assisted, classroom-assisted, teacher-assisted, peer-assisted, television-assisted, mobile-assisted...language learning?...On its own [the computer] does not create new opportunities for learning, but certainly facilitates a variety of communication scenarios, a variety of authentic language input, a variety of intelligent CALL...applications and a variety of ‘cognitive tools..’ (p. 101). Making an analogy with jazz, he identifies reflection, interaction and experimentation as possible hallmarks of developing autonomy (pp. 89-91). However he immediately follows up with “Concepts such as reflection, interaction and experimentation should not be seen as inherently beneficial to language learning nor should the application of technology be viewed as inherently beneficial.” (p. 103). This is a salutary reminder of the need for detailed attention to process and careful evaluation of any initiatives which are supposed to encourage learner autonomy. His contrasting examples, entitled “How to fail miserably in implementing learner autonomy principles”, (pp. 104 – 105), let us see how the addition of preparatory and follow up work plus some scaffolded pair work, turned a computer-based class from a failure into a success. He introduces the term “affordance” (Gibson, 1979), to describe the potential actions supported by a learning environment, and explains how additional tools, such as transcripts of students’ conversations, can increase the affordance-value of an environment. (pp. 107 – 109).

The following two papers focus on the art of advising students: Gremmo takes a very

honest look at the interaction between advisor and advisee to see how much impact the advice had, while Karlsson and Kjisik analyze the importance of learner histories. My interest was caught by the use of Eva Hoffman's term, "the fracture between language and experience" in the latter paper. Karlsson and Kjisik suggest that these "'fractures' between language and experience can be made into the building blocks by the process of writing and sharing stories." (p. 186). This seems to me to encapsulate the benefits of language histories, or indeed any kind of reflection on an experience of the gap between what was aimed for and what was achieved, very elegantly.

In my opinion, Nakata's overview of the current state of play in implementing autonomy-building strategies in Japan, would fit better in the final section "Looking Ahead" rather than with "Advisor, counsellor and teacher development". Nakata's commitment to pro-autonomy teaching is clear, and he makes no bones about the need for smaller class-sizes and teacher-development, but without touching on the socio-political background it is (in my view) difficult to give the whole story.

Aoki makes up for this deficit in her paper "Where learner autonomy could fail a second language user: three level analysis of social context." (pp. 236-257). I would have bought the book for this paper alone, as it is both incisive and grounded in examples full of interest. The first section consists of discourse analysis of contrasting contexts, one where a native-speaker interlocutor assists the learner and one where the reverse happens. (One point for a future edition would be to translate the transcriptions into English.) Aoki makes the point that [untrained] "native speakers often tend to sacrifice forms for the sake of communication when a second language speaker is struggling to formulate what s/he has to say." (p. 244)

I have experienced this and agree with Aoki that it is not easy to find friends or volunteer teachers who will put up with providing scaffolding rather than instant answers. This is what Aoki calls the "micro-level" context. Her next example ("meso-level") concerns identity construction in L2, as revealed by a Korean woman who experienced difficulty expressing her true self in Japanese to her critical husband but gained confidence when speaking Japanese at a swimming club and also with a Japanese friend she had known back in her home country. Aoki comments "Learner autonomy alone would not be enough for second language learners to sustain old social identities and forge new ones of their choice... success depends on who they come into contact with." (p. 249). Finally, for the "macro-level", taking the example of an adult male Brazilian learner of Japanese, she addresses the "structural conditions, be they economic, social or political...that support or restrict learner autonomy as a capacity." (p. 250) She shows how the system has failed to help this man despite his eagerness to study, mainly due to the harsh economic conditions he is under. She calls for "more balanced, holistic approaches that situate individual capacity in the social context and focus on all of its three levels", those levels being, discourse analysis, ethnography and the macro level of "politics, demography and economy". (p. 254). She talks about the challenge of future research, which might draw on all three levels, "solving" of the "paradigmatic contradiction" between them. In the JSL (Japanese as a second language) context, she suggests the need for a more equal relationship between teacher and student, a more sophisticated attitude in relation to learning materials and resources such as study centres for JSL. Aoki's argument is of practical importance because Japan will need more guest workers to deal with the aging population in coming years. In the wider

context of applied linguistics research as a whole, her challenge to carry out research with greater awareness of various research paradigms makes a thought-provoking finale to “Mapping the Terrain”, which is both inspiring in its call to mixed methods research, and empowering as an example of how it can be done. In contrast, Benson’s paper, (which precedes Aoki’s in section 4) seems to me to be weighed down by a determination to problematize the relationship between instructed and non-instructed learning. As mentioned above, the creation of two separate categories of analysis might tend to work as a distraction from fruitful collaboration between classroom teachers, advisors and learners.

However, the diversity of views and experiences encompassed in the book as a whole, bears testimony to the variety of learner autonomy studies and their practical applications, especially in university foreign language learning settings today.

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