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19 Autonomy and Agency

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Introduction

This volume is about Psychology of Language Learning and Teaching (PLLT), and the two constructs to be discussed in this chapter, learner and/or teacher autonomy and agency, seem to be treated differently in previous reviews of the field. Even in an updated review of L2 learner psychology, Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) mention only briefly the first construct, i.e., *autonomy* viewing it as one individual difference (ID). In contrast, in *Exploring Psychology in Language Learning and Teaching*, Williams, Mercer, and Ryan (2016) review only the second construct, i.e., *agency* in relation to aspects of self-regulation, including learning strategies and styles. In a review of individual (L2 learner) *social* differences, Duff (2017) discusses agency, in addition to identities, communities and trajectories, or with reference "to larger social constructs, groups, histories, boundaries, and ideologies that are also discursively invoked and (re)produced in social settings" (p. 380). Most recently, in *Language teacher psychology*, edited by Mercer and Kostoulas (2018), autonomy and agency are discussed in a few chapters but only in passing. Interestingly, three of the recent reviews focus on L2 learners, and just one on L2 teachers, pointing to a general bias towards research on L2 learning rather than teaching in applied linguistics.

In this chapter, we review autonomy and agency as related to L2 learner and teacher psychology. We discuss the significance of the two constructs in understanding the personal, yet socially mediated nature of L2 learning and teaching processes. The two constructs are first discussed *separately*, but we conclude the chapter by noting the close connections that the constructs turn out to have.

Autonomy
The construct in psychology

The term *autonomy* comes from Greek: *auto* meaning 'self' and *nomos* meaning 'rule or law', that is, 'a state that is self-ruled or -governed', and related terms abound, including self-instruction, self-regulation, independent learning, self-access learning, and self-directed learning. Psychology and education seem to be the main disciplines that have influenced developments in fostering (and doing research) on autonomy in SLA. Of the different schools of psychology, autonomy has been addressed especially within *social psychology* (and positive psychology): autonomy is claimed to be an important *psychological need*. It "represents a sense of volition, or the feeling of doing something by one's own decision or initiative" (Ryan & Sapp, 2007, p. 90). When individuals behave autonomously, they feel better and perform better. In contrast, if they lack autonomy, they may lose interest and not feel well. More specifically, within Self-Determination Theory (launched by Ryan and Deci, 2000), autonomy is viewed in relation to another two psychological needs: 1) competence (or the need to be effective in dealing with the environment) and 2) relatedness (or the need to have close and affectionate relationships with others). Autonomy can be viewed either as a fairly stable personal trait or as a state related to motivation (which in turn can be intrinsic or extrinsic); and in the latter case, it can vary from one situation to another or from moment to moment (Legault, 2018, p. 2). The experience of autonomy is always subjective, and dependent on 1) the perceived locus of causality (being either internal or external), 2) a sense of volition, and 3) perceived choice (Reeve, 2014, pp. 141–169). To satisfy the need of individuals for autonomy, contexts are needed that "facilitate the development and satiation of the need for autonomy by offering choice and opportunity for self-direction. They nurture inner motivational resources, offer explanations and rationales, and use informational language rather than directives or commands" (Legault, 2018, p. 2).

Of the experts in education (for a comprehensive review, see Benson, 2011, pp. 26– 57), school reformists over the past few centuries from Rousseau to Dewey, Freire and Rogers have called for greater freedom in learning. Secondly, adult educationalists have advocated for greater flexibility in organizing teaching for their specific groups of learners, namely, adults. Thirdly, psychologists have launched new ideas including constructivist and sociocultural theories and experiential learning, in which learners should be viewed as active and agentive participants responsible for their learning (instead of passive recipients of teaching). As a result, teachers' roles must shift, too within such approaches: from transmitters of information to facilitators of learning. In addition, philosophers, since Kant (from the 18th century), have been emphasizing the free will of individuals and being rational when making decisions; and more recently, post-modernists have raised some critical points, being critical of the assumed essentialist nature of phenomena. Finally, language

educationalists have also launched some new L2 teaching approaches over the past few decades, including communicative, humanistic and task-based approaches. These have increased interest in fostering autonomy, initially that of learners, but more recently that of teachers, too, in SLA (or more broadly in L2 learning and teaching or *L2 education*).

The construct in SLA

In SLA, *autonomy* has traditionally (and briefly) been defined as "the capacity to take control of one's learning …" (Benson, 2011, p. 2). The fostering of autonomy in SLA (or applied linguistics) grew out of the need in the 1970s in Europe to ensure opportunities for adult learners (with families and jobs) to continue learning L2s possibly after compulsory education: they needed greater flexibility in organizing their studies. To cater for their special needs, self-access learning centres were set up in different countries. Initially, the focus was on fostering the autonomy of learners and only more recently on that of teachers.

By now autonomy has been researched for some 40 years in the field. Research on it originated in Europe but has since spread to all levels of language education and to different parts of the world, arriving most recently in Africa as the last continent to engage with autonomy in language teaching (for details, see Chik, Naoki, & Smith, 2016).

To understand the nature of autonomy in SLA we draw on three key reviews, namely, an extensive book-length account by Benson (2011), an update from (2001), and articles by Benson (2006) and Lamb (2017).

In SLA, autonomy, and especially that of learners, has been widely advocated and researched for a number of *reasons* (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012, p. 3): 1) (learner) autonomy improves the quality of L2 learning; 2) it makes studying possible not only in the classroom but also out of the classroom; 3) it makes life-long learning possible; 4) it is a human right; and 5) it promotes democracy in societies. A comprehensive bibliography maintained for some years by an AILA Special Interest Group contained over 1,200 entries on (learner and/or teacher) autonomy, and since then research on the topic has kept flourishing.

Over the years, there have been attempts to characterize (*learner*) *autonomy* either by compiling shorter or longer *lists of features* that it is claimed to comprise or *not* to comprise (the idea being to

challenge possible misconceptions of the construct), or by providing concise *definitions* of it. Table 1 illustrates how the definitions have evolved over time.

Table 1	
Definitions of autonomy	
Type of definition	Sample definitions
Focus	
Cognitive definition (informed by cognitive psychology) *Attribute of the learner (= **personal** autonomy): ability/ capacity to control; willingness; independence*	"…the ability to take charge of one's own learning … To take charge of one's own learning is to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning, i.e., - determining the objectives - defining the contents and progressions - selecting methods and techniques to be used - monitoring the procedure of acquisition … (rhythm, time, place, etc.) - evaluating what has been acquired." (Holec, 1981, p. 3) "The basis of learner autonomy is that the learner accepts responsibility for his or her learning. This acceptance has both socio-affective and cognitive implications: it entails at once a positive attitude to learning and the development of a capacity to reflect on the content and process of learning with a view to bringing them as far as possible under conscious control." (Little, 1995, p. 175)
Socio-cognitive definition (informed, e.g., by social constructivism, sociocultural theory, situated learning) *A capacity of the learner that can be developed in social contexts; interdependence; collaboration/negotiation; affordances and constraints*	"… concerned with the expression and exploration of a learner's own meanings and purposes, facilitated by a process of negotiation and mediation in an atmosphere of genuine dialogue and collegiality." (Huang, 2006, cited in Teng, 2018, p. 4) "the competence to develop as a self-determined, socially responsible and critically aware participant in (and beyond) educational environments, within a vision of education as (inter)personal empowerment and social transformation" (Jiménez Raya, Lamb, & Vieira, 2017, cited in Vieira, 2018, p. 164; note: this definition applies not only to learners but also to *teachers*)

Systemic definition (informed, e.g., by ecology, complexity) *A system consisting of parts that interact*	"a complex socio-cognitive system, subject to internal and external constraints, which manifests itself in different degrees of independence and control of one's own learning process. It involves capacities, abilities, attitudes, willingness, decision making, choices, planning, actions, and assessment either as a language learner or as a communicator inside or outside the classroom. As a complex system it is dynamic, chaotic, unpredictable, non-linear, adaptive, open, self-organizing, and sensitive to initial conditions and feedback" (Paiva 2006, cited in Murray, & Lamb, 2018b, p. 11, in the chapter manuscript)
Critical definition (or politically oriented; informed, e.g., by critical discourse analysis, sociolinguistics) *Earlier on: challenging essentialist notions of learner autonomy; more recently: viewing autonomy as a feature of larger units, consisting of the learner and other people involved in his or her efforts to learn or use L2s (= **collectivist** autonomy); struggle and resistance*	"a political, collectivist construct, interwoven in space/place with communities and networks rather than individuals as the basic unit" (Lamb & Vodicka, 2018, p. 10).

The definitions in Table 1 are listed from the earliest and most widely cited to some more recent ones to indicate how understandings of autonomy have evolved over the past few decades, depending on different background theories or perspectives. Autonomy can either be looked as an attribute of the learner or that of the learning context and/or environment. As an attribute of the learner, it can be viewed as something the learner is born with (*ability*) or as something that can be developed, if needed (*capacity*). Control, in turn, can involve three dimensions of learning: 1) self-management, 2) cognitive processes, and 3) content; or more specifically: where, when, how, what, how much, and why learn an L2? Yet another way of describing autonomy is to talk about a learner's ability, desire and freedom to choose (instead of taking control over) (Huang & Benson, 2013, pp. 7–11). Interestingly, the more recent definitions emphasize that autonomy is an outcome of negotiation and cooperation of learners with the teacher involved in the learning situation and results in the empowerment and social transformation of both parties (see, e.g., Murray, 2014). This rather highlights their *inter*dependence than independence and, thus, the social nature of the construct. In addition, some definitions stress the systemic nature of autonomy, and, therefore, its

complexity and dynamicity as a construct. Over the years, some more critical voices have been raised, too (reviewed in Benson, 2006, 2011, pp. 23–25). Initially, the essentialist nature of (learner) autonomy was challenged; and, more recently, it has been suggested that autonomy involves communities and networks of people (i.e., not just the learner and/or the teacher) located in specific spaces, or places and times (Murray & Lamb, 2018).

Implications for practice and research

Over the past few decades, the various ways of fostering (learner) autonomy and doing research on the construct can be grouped under six *approaches* (Table 2), based on the reviews by Benson (2006, 2011, pp. 121–198) and Lamb (2017).

Table 2	
Approaches to promote autonomy in language learning and teaching/language education	
<u>Approaches to promote autonomy</u>	<u>Practices/Applications</u>
Resource-based approach	Self-access, tandem learning, distance learning, self-instruction, out-of-class learning, including study abroad
Technology-based approach	Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) with its various phases over the past few decades; mobile-assisted language learning (MALL)
Learner-based approach	Giving advice or training, e.g., in the use of learning strategies or techniques; or fostering learner development (e.g., manuals, sessions, courses)
Classroom-based approach	Planning and implementing classroom learning; evaluating classroom learning, including self-assessment, e.g., DIALANG, an online diagnostic language assessment system for 14 European languages, developed at the University of Lancaster, UK
Curriculum-based approach	Applying process syllabi, e.g., Autonomous Learning Modules (ALMS), developed at the University of Helsinki, Finland, with sessions on: reflecting on past language learning experiences; raising awareness of language learning strategies and use of these; conducting a needs analysis; setting goals and making plans for future
Teacher-based approach	Organizing advising and counselling for learners, and providing them with technical and psycho-social support (with consequent

	changes in traditional teacher roles); (re)organizing language teacher education to promote learner and/or teacher autonomy; advancing teacher autonomy in other respects, too, regarding teachers' professional development in general

As is evident (from Table 2), *learner autonomy* has been fostered in a variety of contexts: in the classroom, outside the classroom, and, most recently, virtually/online. Overall, the approaches have had two aims: 1) to provide learners with opportunities to make decisions about the ways they would like to study more independently, and 2) to provide learners with opportunities for self-directed learning. The means (or practices) of reaching the first aim (or independent learning) have focused on learner *external* factors (e.g., self-management). In contrast, the means to reach the second aim (or autonomous learning) have focused on learner *internal* factors, including self-awareness, self-regulation, learning strategies, beliefs or metacognitive knowledge, and motivation. Research on learner autonomy has addressed any of these in the contexts/environments outlined in Table 2.

Initially, the role of teachers seems to have been only secondary in enabling learner autonomy. More recently, the fostering of autonomy has been viewed as a joint effort by learners and teachers (for a general framework of promoting pedagogy for autonomy in language education, see Jiménez Raya, Lamb, & Vieira, 2017). Thus, it is now recognized that the fostering of *teacher autonomy* can be an aim in itself regarding teachers' own professional development over careers of some 40 years (starting from teacher education), and, as such, worth fostering and doing research on. More specifically, it has been suggested that teacher autonomy be viewed as a transitional process being of three types, depending on the role(s) teachers take on: 1) when being involved in their learners' efforts to learn L2s, 2) when developing themselves as professionals, and 3) when maintaining their professional freedom (Benson & Huang, 2008), and so the focus of studies can vary. Recently, autonomy has been linked to a number of other constructs adopted from (positive) psychology, such as professional well-being and positive emotions (see, e.g., Gabryś-Barker & Gałajda, 2016; Gkonou, Dewaele, & King, 2020).

Future directions

Research on (learner) autonomy has typically been conducted on the initiative of a teacher or groups of teachers working in their specific educational contexts (possibly as a result of curriculum revisions) and with their specific groups of students. Basically, the studies have sought to find out:

1) how autonomous their students are currently in their efforts to learn L2s; 2) how the teachers themselves have attempted to foster the autonomy of their learners and with what effects; and 3) how autonomy is related to the L2 learning outcomes of their students (for details, see, e.g., Benson, 2011, pp. 201–239). Furthermore, the studies can be characterized as being for the most part *action research* in nature: the idea being to find solutions to everyday real problems and bring about immediate changes in practices (for a recent collection of articles along these lines, see Ludwig, Pinter, van de Poehl, Smits, Tassinari, & Ruelens, 2018).

To complement the previous reviews cited so far, we compiled a list of some highlights in the field published more recently (Table 3), pointing to further directions in theory, practice, and research in fostering learner and/or autonomy.

Table 3

Some recent highlights (of the length of full books or edited collections) pointing to new directions in research on autonomy

Recent publications	Focus: learner/L and/or teacher/T	Context	Main contents
Díaz-Vera (2011)	L autonomy	Virtual	Exploring applications of mobile-assisted L2 learning (MALL)
Everhard & Murphy (2015)	L autonomy	Classroom	Exploring three types of assessment
Murray & Fujishima (2015)	L autonomy	Out-of-classroom	Setting up L(anguage)-cafés to practise the use of L2s; narratives
Barnard & Li (2016)	L autonomy	Teacher education	Studying L2 teachers' beliefs about L autonomy, case studies, questionnaire (complemented with interviews and discussions), replications/adaptations of Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012)
Cappellini, Lewis, & Rivens Mompean (2017)	L autonomy	Virtual	Exploring further applications of computer-assisted L2 learning (CALL), Web 2.0 (or Stage 3 in CALL developments)
Jiménez Raya, Ramos, Javier, & Tassinari (2017)	L/T autonomy	Higher education	University students and teachers, teacher trainees

Little, Dam, & Legenhausen (2017)	L autonomy	Classroom	L2 teaching of learners of mixed abilities (basic education, Denmark); logbooks and posters; (longitudinal design) and immigrants (university, Ireland)
Maschmeier (2017)	L autonomy	Classroom	Expanding classroom contexts into language and content integrated learning (CLIL), Germany
Ludwig & Mynard (2018)	L autonomy	Higher education	Advising, university students

The selected highlights (most reporting more than one study) point to further and further possibilities of fostering autonomy, still mainly that of learners though, expanding contexts from regular L2 classrooms to CLILL classrooms (and beyond), illustrating ways of raising awareness of issues related to autonomy by administering a questionnaire, and diversifying theorising in the field and its research methodologies (in addition, for a recent textbook on *action research*, see Digilitaş & Griffiths, 2017, and another on *case studies*, see Jiménez, Raya, & Vieira, 2015).

One of the most recent collections that we reviewed is entitled *Space, place, and autonomy in language learning* (Murray & Lamb, 2018). It stands out from those found in Table 3 in a number of respects: it broadens autonomy to apply to any speaker of more than one language or *multilinguals*; it replaces contexts with the notion of *spaces* being transformed into meaningful *places* for L2 learning (and being of three types: physical, virtual or metaphorical, including curriculums); it views autonomy in such terms as struggle and resistance; it is interdisciplinary in its theoretical starting points; and, finally, it uses a variety of research methodologies (including ethnography). Overall, the volume sheds "fresh light on the definition and nature of autonomy as a political, collectivist construct, interwoven in space/place with communities and networks rather than individuals as the basic unit, thus extending critical versions of autonomy in language learning", as is noted by two of its contributors (Lamb & Vodicka, 2018, p. 10). In our opinion, this volume is bound to take autonomy and its research to yet unexplored roads in the years to come.

Agency
The construct in psychology

The word *agency* is a derivation of Latin *agentem*, meaning 'effective, powerful', and it is used in social and educational sciences as well as in SLA to describe individuals' capacity to affect their environment. At the core of the construct of agency is the idea of learners as active participants in their learning process rather than as passive receivers of outside input. This power to act is, however, always considered in connection to existing conditions and affordances surrounding the individual. As a construct, it is, thus, a *relational* phenomenon.

Agency is an interdisciplinary construct used in many socially oriented research traditions such as anthropology (Ahearn, 2001; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998) and sociology (Archer, 2003; Giddens, 1984). It became relevant in psychology with the rise of the socially oriented theories and research approaches, including sociocultural theories (Vygotsky, 1978) and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1998). Compared to behavioristic theories that assume learning to be a reactive process, these theories imply an active subject who observes, processes and relates to the environment. In attempts to define agency in psychology, the later work of Albert Bandura has been especially influential. Accordingly, *agency* can be defined "to intentionally make things happen by one's action" (Bandura, 2001, p. 2). In this line of thought, agency is shaped by an individual's perceived efficacy, intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness (Bandura, 2001). This person-centered perception of the construct is further complicated by the socioculturally- and ecologically-oriented studies that emphasize the socially constructed character of agency (Wertsch, Tulviste, & Hagstrom, 1993). Agency is seen as a phenomenon that is necessarily dependent on both the individual and his or her social environment, as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112).

Agency in SLA

Agency has been brought into the field of SLA through a number of 'theoretical' doorways including sociocognitive theory, performativity, sociocultural theory as well as complex dynamic systems theory (Larsen-Freeman, 2019). In SLA, the definitions of agency have benefited both from research in psychology as well as related research in other disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, and education. Studies have rarely relied solely on one definition, rather they have often drawn on several approaches to agency. The adoption of the construct of agency in SLA has been closely related to the social turn in understanding L2 learning and, in this sense, SLA has followed the pathway evident in psychological research of the construct. While both the individual and the social aspects of agency have been recognized from the beginning, the discussion around the inside-out emphasis (Bandura, 2001) and the outside-in emphasis (Wertsch *et al.*, 1993) of the

construct continues to divide different approaches. Table 4 provides an overview of some influential definitions of agency in SLA. The selected examples do not offer an all-encompassing perspective of existing theoretical approaches to agency in SLA and exclude, e.g., post-structuralism, critical realism, and positioning theory. The selected definitions are, however, representative of the many key phenomena related to agency in SLA.

Table 4

Definitions of agency

<u>Type of definition</u> *Focus*	<u>Sample definitions</u>
Socio-cognitive approach *Capability to influence one's functioning: self-efficacy, intentionality*	"To intentionally make things happen by one's action" (Bandura, 2001, p. 2)
Socio-cultural approach *A socially mediated capacity: mediation, co-construction*	"a relationship that is constantly co-constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual and with the society at large" (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 148)
Dialogical approach *A personally experienced phenomenon: time, space and embodiment*	"a dialogical, or relational, phenomenon that needs to be examined both as subjectively experienced and as collectively emergent" (Dufva & Aro, 2016, p. 38)
Sociologically-oriented ecological approach (informed by Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) *A situated and temporal achievement: temporality, relationality*	"a temporal and situated achievement, which is the outcome of the interplay of iterational, practical-evaluative, and projective dimensions" (Kayi-Aydar, 2015, p. 12; Priestley, Biesta, Philippou, & Robinson, 2015, p. 29)
Psychologically-oriented ecological approach (informed by van Lier, 2008) *A contextually enacted way of being: affordances, systemic perspective*	"a contextually enacted way of being in the world" (van Lier, 2008, p. 163)

Complex dynamic systems approach	"a complex, dynamic system composed of a multitude of interrelated components" (Mercer, 2011, p. 435)
A complex dynamic system: nonlinearity, complexity	

These six different definitions of agency do not necessarily contradict each other but provide complementary perspectives on the phenomenon. The first important feature linked to the construct of agency present in Table 4 is the idea of *intentionality* that is raised by several reviews of the construct in SLA (Kayi-Aydar, 2019; Mercer, 2012; Teng, 2018). When defining agency in this way, the individual's possibility of affecting his or her environment becomes the central feature of the construct. This also aligns with some sociologically informed approaches that focus on the individual's capacity to act otherwise (Giddens, 1984).

Another important feature in understanding the construct of agency in SLA is its *social character*. Although this perspective features in all different definitions of the construct, it has been especially emphasized in socioculturally-oriented studies of the phenomenon. This perspective foregrounds the social character of agency and shifts the focus away from individual intention to co-construction and co-negotiation of agency in a particular setting (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Although this perspective does not necessarily contradict the idea of an intentional subject, it does break the tight bond between agency and voluntariness. It also highlights the outside-in character of agency, especially in terms of interpsychologically constructed learning processes (Reunamo & Nurmilaakso, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978). This perspective also strongly contradicts the idea of agency as a 'property' of an individual (Morita, 2004, p. 590). Another characteristic related to agency by socioculturally-oriented SLA is the idea of *mediation*. In this regard, L2 learners and teachers are not directly connected to their environment, but this relationship, and thus agency, is mediated through material and psychological tools and other people in a particular environment.

In contrast to the sociocultural approaches, dialogical and sociologically-oriented ecological approaches shift the emphasis again to more person-centred perspectives on the phenomenon. To highlight the affective and emotional aspects of agency (Sullivan & McCarthy, 2004), a dialogic approach focuses on the individual's experiences of agency and the personal ways of constructing the relationship with the social environment. Agency is perceived in relation to the life-course of an individual, and agency emerges from his or her previous experiences and future aspirations in a specific social context. This perspective is typical of the ecological approach informed by sociological theorists (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

Some of the latest approaches have paid attention to the *systemic* character of agency. These include the complex dynamic systems approach (Mercer, 2011) and the psychologically-oriented ecological approach (van Lier, 2008). The psychologically-oriented ecological approach is informed especially by the work of Gibson (1982). Accordingly, *affordances* mean individual possibilities for action (such as participating, negotiating or resisting) that exist in particular physical, social and symbolic environments (van Lier, 2011, p. 4). These approaches have sought to avoid dichotomizing the parts of a system and looked at the systems forming agency as a whole. The differences between these two approaches lie in the ways in which change is understood as part of the system. Whereas the complexity approach has highlighted the inherent instability of any system (Larsen-Freeman, 2007) and, therefore, the unpredictable nature of human agency in any particular instance, the ecological approach has opted for patterns and formations of habits that can lead to seemingly stable agency in particular conditions (van Lier, 2010). Typically for these approaches, agency has been perceived as either "through participation and action, or indeed through deliberate nonparticipation or non-action." (Mercer, 2012, p. 42). These definitions of agency are possible only from the systemic perspective where agency is not directly connected to observable changes in the activity of an individual, but to changes in the system.

Implications for practice and research

Compared to research on autonomy, the construct of agency is a relative newcomer to SLA, being introduced along with the sociocultural approaches in the late 1990s. Although the history of the study of the construct is shorter, the large number of studies adopting the construct in recent years seems to highlight the importance of this construct in understanding L2 learning and teaching. Table 5 presents some main types of studies using agency as a key construct and the practical perspectives that these have offered to L2 learning and teaching

Table 5

Types of research on agency in L2 learning and teaching/L2 education

Types of research on agency in SLA	Practices/applications
L2 learner agency	Learners as active agents inside or outside the classroom, and online (Gkonou, 2015; Kalaja, Alanen, Palviainen, & Dufva, 2010; Skinnari, 2014; van Lier 2008; Walker, 2018)

L2 learner/teacher agency and identity construction	Learners/teachers choosing, using and refusing available resources in the construction of their identities (Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Pappa, 2018; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013)
Experience of L2 learner/teacher agency	Different environments affecting the experience of agency (Aro, 2016; Kitade, 2015; Muller, 2015))
Supporting L2 learner agency	Creating pedagogical tools and environments to support agency (Moate & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2014)
Agency and L2 learning	Investigating the relationship between learner agency and language learning (García, 2015)

Based on the existing research, it is possible to draw some important implications for practice and research in SLA. Firstly, agency has been important in affording a perspective on the active role of learners in their L2 learning both in the classroom and outside it (Larsen-Freeman, 2019). As a theoretical construct, it has made it possible to recognize different forms of participation in the classroom and the significance of this participation for L2 learning. Secondly, the studies focusing on individual agency in the development of identities have also pointed out the significance of existing affordances for the ways in which language learners can develop their identities. Along with the studies on the experiences of agency, they have helped to identify crucial elements of positive L2 learning and teaching environments, such as providing space for different learning and teaching styles inside and beyond the classroom (Kayi-Aydar, 2015). The studies have also helped to identify some of the problems that are typical of classroom contexts in supporting pupils' development. For example, the study by Aro (2016) showed how pupils' agency as language learners was curtailed by institutional beliefs about good language learning that recognized only written assignments and schools-based activities as valuable language learning activities. Finally, these studies on language learners have also provided knowledge needed to create environments that offer learners possibilities for active participation and positive identity development. These studies can further contribute to creating better L2 learning practices.

Compared to L2 learner agency, research on L2 teacher agency has until now covered less ground (White, 2018). However, the few existing studies illustrate the applicability of the construct on L2 teachers as well. The studies focusing on teachers' professional development have shown the close

connection of agency and L2 teacher identity (Kitade, 2015; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013). In addition, they have provided a more thorough view of the complex interplay between the environment and the individual, thus providing a useful theoretical tool for a variety of studies adopting a more systemic perspective to L2 teaching.

Future directions

In analysing the existing research on L2 learner and teacher agency, it is possible to state that some research methods have been used frequently when researching the construct, whereas some others have until recently received little attention. Many of the studies up to now have relied on methods such as interviews, autobiographical essays, learning histories, visual means of self-expression and other narrative methods in studying learner and teacher agency. All these methods enable a perspective on the experiential and personal dimensions of agency that have been the focus of these studies. However, research on agency could benefit from greater attention to classroom realities. This would be especially important to gain insights into the second important dimension of human agency, that of *observable behaviours* (Mercer, 2011, p. 42). In addition, research on agency could benefit from studies that would be truly *longitudinal* to trace the development of agency (experience) over longer periods of time (i.e., over years).

To complement the review above, we wish to summarize five recent major publications on agency in SLA (Table 6), pointing to further directions in theory, practice and research on agency.

Table 6

Some recent highlights (of the length of full books or edited collections) pointing to new directions in research on agency

888 Recent publications	Focus: learner/L and/or teacher/T	Context	Main contents
Gao (2010)	L agency	Higher education	Interplay between conditions and agency in university L2 learning; ethnography
Miller (2014)	L agency	Professional life	Discursive co-construction of L agency of adult immigrants; interviews

Deters, Gao, Miller, & Vitanova (2015)	L agency	Classroom	Theoretical, analytical and pedagogical perspectives on L agency in various socio-political contexts; various research methods including (auto)ethnography, interviews and diary entries
Kalaja, Barcelos, Aro, & Ruohotie-Lyhty (2016)	L/T agency	Classroom, higher education and professional life	L and T agency experiences in relation to other constructs, including beliefs and identities (and emotions); longitudinal studies; interviews, visual narratives
Kayi-Aydar, Gao, Miller, Varghese, & Vitanova (2018)	T agency	Classroom and adult education	Agency in different contexts; various research methods including non-participant observation, interviews and document analysis

The selected highlights represent some of the most recent book-length publications on L2 agency and illustrate some potentially novel research designs to explore the construct, including *ethnographic* and *action-research* studies as well as *longitudinal* studies. Methodologically they exploit some new types of data, such as visual narratives, observation and diary entries. They also provide insights into the relationship of agency to various other constructs such as emotions, identities and beliefs pointing to more holistic research approaches (Kalaja, Barcelos, Aro, & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2016) and expand the field of study to some new groups beyond the classroom, such as immigrant adults (Miller, 2014). In the book edited by Kayi-Aydar *et al*. (2018), two studies also point to some possible new research topics in the field such as agency emerging in the human and non-human interaction (Zotzmann, 2018), or the relation between a teacher's positioning and his or her actual performance in the classroom (Back, 2018). The book also provides new insights into L2 teacher agency that has been until recently less studied in the field.

Integrating perspectives on both constructs

Compared to agency, autonomy has had a much longer history in SLA (or L2 education) and it has been researched much more widely, but still with a heavy emphasis on learners. It is only more recently with the introduction of sociocultural theory that the two constructs have begun to be discussed together (Benson, 2006, 2011, pp. 45–49), and, most recently and interestingly, in relation to learner and/or teacher *identity* (Benson & Cooker, 2013; Huang, 2013; Huang & Benson, 2013; Teng, 2018). As noted by Benson (2006, p. 30), "agency can perhaps be viewed as a point of

origin for the development of autonomy, while identity might be viewed as one of its more important outcomes". These developments have resulted in viewing learners and teachers as *human beings* or individuals with agency (instead of processors and providers of input, for example) and in more challenging research designs, pointing to even more complex relationships among the constructs involved in L2 learning and teaching.

The study of the two constructs of autonomy and agency in SLA has had its roots in the socio-cognitive or socio-cultural psychological research and it has lessons to learn from psychology, especially, from its more recent schools, such as positive psychology. These have widened the frameworks within which the two constructs could be viewed as interacting with constructs not considered until very recently, including *all* emotions (not just anxiety), well-being, resilience (not just motivation), and enjoyment. In addition, psychology could set the standards to increase the rigour in conducting quantitative studies in SLA and its two constructs and in applying sophisticated statistical procedures. Until recently, research on autonomy and agency in SLA has focused (narrowly) on the two parties involved in learning and teaching L2s, namely, learners and teachers. It is only very recently that the focus has been widened to any user of more than one language (i.e., multilinguals).

On the other hand, psychology could learn from research in SLA (or Applied Linguistics) to appreciate the possibly greater variety in research methodologies used these days in doing research on autonomy and agency, including various types of qualitative or mixed research methodologies and innovation in types of data collected such as narratives (in various modes), observations, diaries (in addition to interviews) subjected to various kinds of analyses (narrative, discursive, metaphor, ethnographic or content analysis) to gain deeper insights or more unexpected research findings (in comparison to decontextualized generalizations of quantitative studies). These methodologies allow access to phenomena as subjectively experienced or be approached from the perspective of insiders. In addition, these methodologies could make it possible to be more sensitive to the dynamics or interplay of various constructs in specific contexts. It is only recently that psychology, especially positive psychology, has begun to widen its focus to L2 learners and teachers. The number of publications has been on the increase since the late 2010s, which is indeed a positive development.

To conclude, we would like to highlight the significance of the two constructs, autonomy and agency, for future developments in SLA. Depending on the definitions, it is possible to regard autonomy and agency either as overlapping constructs or, as we would like to suggest, as constructs that *complement* each other. Whereas research on agency has focused on contextually enacted ways

of participating, research on autonomy has focused on the developing degree of independence and control of that participation. In our opinion, these complementary perspectives are both necessary in providing insights into the complex interplay between the individual and the social context and in our attempts to develop practical solutions for better L2 learning practices in different environments, and importantly, as put by Lamb (2017, p. 184) "to sustain plurilingualism and multilingualism in the twenty-first century", considering the ever globalizing world of ours.

Reflection questions

1. In your opinion, which of the definitions of *autonomy* and *agency* (reviewed in Sections 2.2 and 3.2) best describe your own experiences of L2 learning/teaching?
2. In which ways have you been agentive in your L2 learning/teaching process(es): consider these over your career as an L2 learner/teacher?
3. In your opinion, which kind of affordances could support the development of L2 learner/teacher autonomy?

Recommended reading

- Little, D., Dam, L., & Legenhausen, L. (2017). *Language learner autonomy: Theory, practice and research.* Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

  The first collection of truly hands-on reports on attempts to foster L2 learner autonomy in basic education (with different kinds of students) and in tertiary education (with immigrant students), partly carried out over years (i.e., being longitudinal) and with indeed impressive learning outcomes.

- Deters, P., Gao, X. (A.), Miller, E. R., & Vitanova, G. (Eds.) (2015). *Theorizing and analyzing agency in second language learning: Interdisciplinary approaches.* Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

  A collection of chapters on learner agency in different socio-political contexts and across different age groups: it includes both theoretical and empirical perspectives on learner agency.

- Teng, M. F. (2018). *Autonomy, agency, and identity in teaching English as a foreign language*. Singapore: Springer.

   A monograph, being one of the first to link three constructs (i.e., autonomy, agency and identity construction) in the context of L2 learning and teaching: it reports findings of a series of studies with L2 learners and teachers, based on their life stories.

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