

## THE SEMANTICS OF LEARNER AUTONOMY IN LANGUAGE LEARNING CLASSROOM

**Dr. Supriya Banerjee**

PhD in Comparative Literature,

Associate Professor

Department of IFS

Amity University in Tashkent

e-mail: [sbanerjee6@amity.uz](mailto:sbanerjee6@amity.uz)

**Abstract:** *The integration of comic studies into language learning has the potential to revolutionize the way students approach autonomy in the classroom. Comics, with their unique characteristics, offer an effective medium for fostering self-directed learning, critical thinking, and creativity among language learners. This article explores the interface between comic studies and learner autonomy, highlighting the potential benefits and opportunities for language learning in the classroom and beyond. There are challenges as well, as autonomous learning is about developing a more self-self-engaging and self-paced learning style, therefore sometimes it proves to be hindrance in developing speaking and listening skills. The role of a teacher as a facilitator and peer to peer learning modes comes in handy in such cases. Hence, autonomous learning does not rule out the role of a teacher as a mediator and a facilitator in this article, rather it outlines the ways and methods to use them as better resources for sustainable and enhanced learning processes.*

**Keywords:** *Autonomy, Diverse classrooms, Comics, Verbal Visual pedagogy, Multimodal learning*

The modern global classroom is a diverse and dynamic space, accommodating students with various learning styles, backgrounds, and preferences in language acquisition. In this context, educators face the challenge of catering to students' individual needs while fostering autonomy in learning. Students today are inclined towards blended and flipped classroom models, seeking control over their learning pace and style. To meet these evolving needs, teachers and facilitators must provide a medium that resonates with students, balancing textual content with visual elements to enhance comprehension and engagement.

Comics emerge as a powerful tool in this educational landscape, offering a rich tapestry of ideas, images, and expressions that cater to the visually oriented and multi-modal nature of contemporary learners. In a world saturated with images and

multimedia, comics provide a unique platform for students to engage with language learning autonomously. By integrating comics into language education, teachers can tap into the inherent appeal of visual storytelling to captivate students and facilitate a deeper understanding of linguistic concepts.

For instance, consider a scenario where a group of students from diverse cultural backgrounds is learning English. Instead of traditional textbooks, the teacher introduces English comics that feature everyday scenarios, colloquial language, and cultural references. Through comics, students not only improve their language skills but also gain insights into the nuances of English-speaking cultures, enhancing their cultural competence. Furthermore, comics offer a versatile approach to language learning. Students can choose from a variety of comic genres, from single-panel cartoons to graphic novels, aligning their learning experience with their interests and preferences. This freedom of choice empowers students to take ownership of their learning journey, fostering autonomy and self-directed learning. In a flipped classroom setting, where students engage with content outside of traditional class time, comics can serve as a valuable resource for independent study. Students can explore comics at their own pace, deciphering language nuances, practicing vocabulary, and honing their reading and comprehension skills in an interactive and engaging manner.

Therefore, the integration of comics into language learning not only aligns with the diverse learning styles and preferences of today's students but also empowers them to take charge of their learning process. By leveraging the visual and narrative richness of comics, educators can create a dynamic and student-centred language learning environment that nurtures autonomy, creativity, and critical thinking among learners in the global classroom of the 21st century.

Comics prove to be effective tools for promoting student autonomy in language learning, as the medium is mostly self-directed and self-driven. From finding resources online to controlling the pace of learning, the learner relies on self-direction, with the teacher's role as a facilitator. The serial nature of comics, with

their panels, frames, and gutter spaces, encourages learners to take control of their reading pace and interpretation, developing their understanding of narrative structure, character development, and story world in a personalized manner (Chun, 2009). The visual-verbal language of comics enhances cognition and affect in language learners, moving away from rote learning and promoting innovative ways of understanding. The breakdown of images and words into multiple meanings and interpretations cultivates critical and creative thinking skills, as learners are instinctively pushed towards a 'Socratic Method' of analysis and understanding. This methodology is particularly effective in language learning calibration, as it encourages learners to engage actively with the material and develop their own understanding of the narrative (Cary, 2004).

For instance, if we consider Bloom's Taxonomy and apply it to learner autonomy and comic studies, we find that it provides a framework for classifying learning objectives and can be used to design activities that promote higher order thinking skills. The use of comics in language learning aligns well with Bloom's Taxonomy, as it allows for the development of various cognitive skills. At the lower levels of the taxonomy, learners can engage in activities that promote knowledge and comprehension, such as:

- Listing and describing characters in a comic
- Defining intriguing words learned from the comic
- Describing the major events in the story

As learners progress to higher levels of the taxonomy, they can engage in activities that promote application, analysis, and evaluation, such as:

- Comparing the setting of the comic to their own environment
- Analyzing cause-and-effect relationships in the story
- Evaluating the ending of the comic and providing reasons for their opinion

The creation of digital comics can be a powerful tool for promoting synthesis, as learners take ownership of their learning by creating their own narratives and developing their language skills through the process of storytelling and visual

representation. By incorporating Bloom's Taxonomy into the design of comic-based activities, educators can create a learning environment that fosters learner autonomy and promotes the development of critical thinking skills. The taxonomy provides a structure for setting clear objectives and guiding classroom teaching and learning, helping to develop higher order thinking among teachers and students.

### The Socio-Cultural Significance of Comics

Beyond the classroom, the cultural significance of comics extends to paratextual spaces, including popular merchandise like T-shirts, posters, coffee mugs, and masks. These items are important relics of an image-saturated popular culture that thrives in a borderless global world. The global popularity of comics, such as Manga from Japan or Manhwa from China, transcends geographical boundaries and can be leveraged to facilitate contextual recognition and reproduction in language learning (Brenner, 2007).

From a feminist perspective, the proliferation of comics-related merchandise presents both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, the widespread availability of these items can be seen as a form of democratization, allowing fans of all genders to engage with and express their love for the medium. However, it is crucial to examine the ways in which these products are designed, marketed, and consumed, as they may perpetuate gender stereotypes or objectify female characters.

Hilary Chute, a prominent scholar in the field of comics studies, emphasizes the importance of considering the intersections of gender, race, and sexuality in the analysis of comics and their paratextual elements. She argues that a feminist approach to comics should not only highlight the contributions of female creators but also critically examine the ways in which gender is represented and negotiated within the medium. Roland Barthes' concept of the "death of the author" is also relevant in this context, as it challenges the notion of a single, authoritative interpretation of a text. When applied to comics merchandise, this idea suggests that the meaning of these items is not solely determined by their creators but is also shaped by the ways in which they are interpreted and appropriated by fans and consumers.

The diverse range of paratextual elements associated with comics, including merchandise and cultural artifacts, plays a crucial role in shaping the perception and consumption of comics on a global scale. These items not only reflect the popularity and influence of comics but also serve as tangible manifestations of the cultural impact of the medium. By engaging with comics-related merchandise, individuals can immerse themselves in the visual and narrative worlds created by comics, fostering a deeper appreciation for the art form and its cultural significance.

Moreover, the widespread appeal of comics merchandise underscores the universal nature of comic storytelling, transcending linguistic and cultural barriers. The popularity of Manga and Manhua, originating from Japan and China respectively, highlights the global reach of comics as a medium for storytelling and artistic expression. By leveraging the cultural resonance of these comics, educators can enhance language learning experiences by providing students with opportunities to engage with diverse narratives and visual styles that reflect different cultural perspectives.

In essence, the cultural significance of comics merchandise serves as a gateway to exploring the rich tapestry of stories and visual narratives embedded in comics from around the world. By incorporating these paratextual elements into language learning contexts, educators can create immersive and engaging experiences that not only promote language acquisition but also foster cross-cultural understanding and appreciation for the diverse artistic traditions represented in comics.

Despite their potential, comics have historically been dismissed as children's literature and have not been given due recognition in academic research and enquiry. However, it is essential to focus on students' autonomy as a vital segment of learning and understanding in the classroom. By embracing comics as a legitimate tool for language learning, educators can tap into their unique strengths and create an environment that promotes learner autonomy, critical thinking, and creativity.

#### Digital Comics and Learner Autonomy

The use of digital comics offers a range of opportunities for learner autonomy. With the ability to access digital comics online, learners can take control of their learning pace, selecting resources that align with their interests and learning style. The interactive nature of digital comics, with features like animations and hotspots, can further enhance learner engagement and autonomy (Monnin, 2010).

Moreover, the creation of digital comics can be a powerful tool for promoting learner autonomy. By giving learners, the opportunity to create their own comics, educators can encourage them to take ownership of their learning, developing their language skills through the process of storytelling and visual representation. This approach can be particularly effective in language learning, as it allows learners to engage with the material in a more active and creative way (Versaci, 2001).

In understanding the study of digital comics and fostering learner autonomy, the deconstructionist perspective of Jacques Derrida offers a unique lens through which to analyze the dynamics at play. Derrida's deconstructive approach challenges traditional notions of language, text, and meaning, emphasizing the inherent complexities and ambiguities within linguistic structures.

When applied to the creation of digital comics as a tool for promoting learner autonomy, Derrida's deconstruction can unravel the layers of meaning embedded in the process. By giving learners, the opportunity to create their own comics, educators are not only encouraging active participation but also inviting a deconstructive analysis of the narrative and visual elements involved. Derrida's emphasis on the play of presence and absence, as well as the interplay between speech and writing, can be reflected in the process of crafting digital comics. Learners engaging in the creation of comics are prompted to navigate the complexities of visual storytelling, textual representation, and the fusion of image and language. This process inherently involves a deconstruction of traditional boundaries between text and image, inviting learners to explore the fluidity and multiplicity of meanings within their creations.

Moreover, Derrida's concept of "*différance*," which highlights the deferral and difference inherent in language, can be applied to the act of creating digital comics.

As learners construct narratives through a combination of visual and textual elements, they are engaging in a process that defers fixed meanings and invites multiple interpretations. This fluidity and openness to interpretation align with the principles of deconstruction, encouraging learners to question, challenge, and reconstruct their understanding of language and visual representation. The act of creating digital comics becomes not only a means of expression but also a pathway to deconstructing and reconstructing meaning, empowering learners to take ownership of their learning journey in a dynamic and transformative way.

### Conclusion

The interface between comic studies and learner autonomy is a critical area of research that has the potential to transform language learning in the classroom. By leveraging the unique strengths of comics, educators can create an environment that promotes learner autonomy, critical thinking, and creativity. As the use of digital comics continues to grow, it is essential to recognize the opportunities they offer for learner autonomy and to develop methodologies that harness their full potential. This article highlights the need for further research and exploration in this field, with the aim of enhancing language learning outcomes and fostering autonomous learning among students.

### References:

1. Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author" *Aspen*, no 5-6, 1967, pp 3-10.
2. Brenner, R. (2007). *Understanding manga and anime*. Libraries Unlimited.
3. Cary, S. (2004). *Going Graphic: Comics at Work in the Multilingual Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
4. Chun, C. W. (2009). Critical literacies and graphic novels for English-language learners: Teaching Maus. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 53(2), 144-153.
5. Chute, Hillary L. *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics*, Columbia University Press, 2010.

6. Davis, R. (1997). Comics: A Multi-dimensional Teaching Aid in Integrated-skills Classes.
7. Derrick, J. (2008). Using Comics with ESL/EFL Students. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 11(7).
8. D'Hautcourt, A. (2008). Un nouvel outil pour l'apprentissage de la lecture du français: les blogs BD. *Journal of Inquiry and Research*, 87 (march 2008); Kansai Gaidai University, Hirakata, Japan.
9. Mollica, A. (1976). Cartoons in the Language Classroom. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 32(4), 424-444.
10. Monnin, K. (2010). Teaching graphic novels: Practical strategies for the secondary ELA classroom. Maupin House Publishing, Inc..
11. Versaci, R. (2001). How comic books can change the way our students see literature: One teacher's perspective. *The English Journal*, 91(2), 61-67.
12. Bowkett, S. (2011). Using comic art to improve speaking, reading and writing. Florence, KY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis.