

Review of *Sharing Less Commonly Taught Languages in Higher Education: Collaboration and Innovation*

Sharing Less Commonly Taught Languages in Higher Education: Collaboration and Innovation.

Edited by Emily Heidrich Uebel, Angelika Kraemer, and Luca Giupponi. Routledge, 2024.

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Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs) have long occupied a marginal position within U.S. higher education language programs. For decades, these programs have faced common challenges, including unstable enrollment, isolated instructors, limited teaching materials, and recurring budget cuts. Following the sudden shift to remote instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic, a central question emerges: How can institutions sustain a broad range of language offerings amid new challenges and opportunities? *Sharing Less Commonly Taught Languages in Higher Education: Collaboration and Innovation*, edited by Emily Heidrich Uebel, Angelika Kraemer, and Luca Giupponi, is a timely and highly relevant contribution to the field of LCTL education. This book brings together 17 scholarly chapters that combine historical retrospectives, real-world case studies, practical strategies, and

forward-looking reflections. It aims to offer structures and examples for collaboration and innovation across instruction, curriculum, programs, and institutions. The central argument is that meaningful collaboration and resource sharing require not only the effort of individual instructors but also institutional structures, educational policies, technological infrastructure, curriculum design, and communities of practice. Taken as a whole, this volume provides a comprehensive blueprint for moving LCTL programs from a model of solitary survival to one of collaborative sustainability, making it essential reading for language instructors, program administrators, and institutional leaders committed to maintaining linguistic diversity in higher education.

This book consists of an introductory chapter and four parts that systematically explore the challenges and opportunities of sharing LCTL courses. The introductory chapter, co-authored by the three editors, sets the tone for the volume with clarity and a strong conceptual framing. They acknowledge the fluidity of definitions in this field, whether based on the Modern Language Association (MLA) language rankings or the focus of the National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages (NCOLCTL), while emphasizing the common challenges faced by LCTLs. To

address these challenges, the chapter introduces the concept of “sharing” and categorizes three primary models of cross-institutional sharing: bilateral language exchange, multi-institutional language consortia, and asymmetric language exchange involving reciprocal funding or services. This framework is particularly helpful to readers who are new to course sharing because it helps them understand the administrative and financial affordances and challenges of collaborative structures. This chapter also highlights the growing momentum of cooperation in LCTL education, driven by federal Title VI grants, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the National Less Commonly Taught Languages Resource Center (NLRC) at Michigan State University, and other institutional and private funding initiatives. As the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the global shift from traditional teaching toward online or hybrid teaching, the editors argue that “now” is a crucial moment to rethink how LCTL programs can be sustained through collaboration, innovation, and shared commitment.

Part I, “Shared Structures and Established Consortia,” focuses on large-scale, long-standing models of course sharing, providing the historical and practical foundation for the entire book. The chapters begin by tracing the history of the Big Ten Academic Alliance (BTAA) before

examining its development into a well-known course-sharing initiative. Subsequent chapters explore the impact of other university consortia and collaborative initiatives, including the University of Wisconsin System Collaborative Language Program, the Shared Course Initiative among Columbia University, Cornell University, and Yale University, and the Duke–UVA–Vanderbilt Consortium. These chapters demonstrate that successful sharing programs depend on substantial human and financial resources, well-developed administrative processes, mutual trust, and sustained coordination among instructors, administrators, and participating institutions. These examples illustrate that collaboration can broaden students’ access to languages, while also acknowledging some cautionary lessons regarding program expansion, partnership establishment, and long-term sustainability.

Part II, “Curriculum Development and Building Program Capacity,” shifts the focus from institutional frameworks to curriculum design and the long-term sustainability of LCTL initiatives. The chapters begin with a shared curriculum development project for Arabic, Hebrew, and Turkish for intermediate-level language learners, followed by a consensus-based approach to South Asian language instruction. The remaining two chapters introduce a Russian

outreach project that builds university–K–12 pipelines in Kansas and the Yale–NUS College model of developing language programs through institutional partnerships. These chapters reveal that sharing is not only a response to enrollment challenges but also a catalyst for curriculum reconstruction, program development, and innovative pedagogical collaboration. This section confirms that establishing sustainable LCTL programs requires more than increasing the number of course offerings; it is also crucial to develop institutional partnerships with shared curricular visions and innovative approaches to language instruction.

Part III, “Case Studies,” offers insights into specific languages and highlights the current state of LCTL education under various conditions. This section begins with East Asian languages to illustrate how shared linguistic features can create learning advantages, and then turns to Kaqchikel Maya to show how innovative teaching models at the University of Kansas increased student enrollment during the pandemic. The following chapter critically examines potential issues with course sharing, particularly regarding African languages, while the final two chapters explore the successes and challenges of Arabic course sharing within the Great Lakes Colleges Association and describe how a Portuguese teaching team balances pedagogical differences to develop three

intermediate-to-advanced courses. These detailed cases caution against drawing “one-size-fits-all” conclusions; rather, they demonstrate that each language has distinct histories, institutional conditions, learner populations, political contexts, and instructional needs, thereby offering contextualized experiences for educators teaching different languages.

Part IV, “Sharing Strategies,” serves as the practical conclusion to the book, distilling strategies for sustaining LCTL collaboration and offering guidance for educators and administrators. Topics include leveraging technology to build learning communities between in-person and remote students in Romanian language courses; adopting an assessment-driven backward design model for curriculum development; promoting equitable language learning opportunities across the K–16 spectrum through the “Languages Without Borders” initiative in Washington State; and identifying the four core pillars of successful partnerships: collaboration, communication, curriculum, and communities of practice. This section offers practical guidance from a strategic perspective, noting that curriculum sharing is a powerful tool for addressing LCTL challenges but requires ongoing collaboration and innovation. Throughout the book, each chapter balances empirical data, real-world examples,

academic analysis, and future recommendations, collectively outlining the current state of LCTL instruction and the broader landscape of curriculum sharing.

As a substantial contribution dedicated to collaboration and innovation in LCTLs, this book offers significant value to the field. First, it offers historical depth and contextual clarity. It traces the evolution of LCTL collaboration, from post-World War II federal language programs to contemporary digital consortia, revealing how shifts in external funding, technological advancements, and the global pandemic have shaped its development. This historical perspective helps readers understand the reasons behind the formation of current collaborative structures and how to adapt them to future changes in higher education. The analysis of pre-pandemic instruction and post-pandemic online language instruction is particularly insightful, demonstrating that technology-mediated instruction can expand access to LCTL learning. In addition, the clear categorization of three language-sharing models provides researchers with a useful analytical framework for classifying and studying LCTL collaboration on a broader scale.

Furthermore, the book is grounded in real cases, bridging the long-standing gap between academic research

and frontline teaching. Unlike purely theoretical works, most authors are affiliated with major U.S. universities, including Michigan State University, Cornell University, and the University of Chicago, and many serve as LCTL instructors, program coordinators, or resource center directors. Each chapter draws on practical experience, with specific examples ranging from BTAA's inter-institutional course sharing protocols to flipped classroom designs for shared online LCTL courses. For program directors struggling with low enrollment or faculty shortages, the book offers guidance on consortium principles, cost structures, and coordination workflows. For individual instructors, the book provides teaching strategies, sharing models, and community-building techniques.

Third, the book maintains a critical perspective by acknowledging the affordances and limitations of sharing. The authors address several core challenges: the excessive workload of administrative coordinators in program expansion, inconsistencies in academic calendars among partner institutions, uneven student enrollment in asynchronous online courses, and the risks of cultural insensitivity in course sharing across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. This balanced stance enhances the book's credibility. The book does not present sharing as the only

solution, but as a flexible strategy that must be adapted to local linguistic, cultural, and institutional contexts. By featuring both successful collaborations and ongoing challenges, the book presents a realistic and credible picture of LCTL sharing.

A potential limitation is that most of the case studies come from research universities, with relatively little attention paid to community colleges or institutions serving minority communities. Another limitation is the limited empirical evidence on student learning outcomes, such as retention, proficiency development, and learning experiences. Future research could further examine how course sharing affects faculty working conditions, professional recognition, and career development, especially for non-tenure-track or untenured faculty, as well as how students perceive shared language courses. Nevertheless, these limitations do not detract from the book's overall achievements. Its open-access format ensures accessibility to a wide readership. In summary, this valuable collection merits careful reading by language instructors, program administrators, and institutional leaders and will serve as a useful reference for those involved in LCTL education.

Reviewer Bio

Bo Liu is Assistant Professor and Director of the Chinese Program at the University of Arizona. His research focuses on Chinese language pedagogy, language learning motivation, world language teacher education, and curriculum development. He has published in peer-reviewed journals and held leadership roles in professional organizations in the U.S.