What is this thing called autonomy?¹
Finding a definition and a model

Carol J. Everhard

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
everhard@enl.auth.gr

Abstract
Interest in autonomy in language learning has escalated in recent decades. Despite its relevance to modern-day teaching, what autonomy is and how language teachers can promote it remains partly enveloped in an aura of mystery. Some factors preventing this aura from being lifted will be examined.

The impediments and affordances encountered in the search for a definition and a model of autonomy suited to the Assessment for Autonomy Research Project (AARP), conducted 2005-2010 in the School of English, Aristotle University, are described. Both the AARP definition and model could go some way towards making autonomy more transparent and quantifiable.

Keywords: autonomy, defining autonomy, models of autonomy, transparency, measurability

1. Introduction
Interest in autonomy in language learning has escalated in recent decades, as testified by the increasing number of events dedicated to the subject and the ever-growing literature within the field of applied linguistics, which focus on autonomy. Even so, exactly what autonomy is and how language teachers can promote it remains, to some extent, enveloped in an aura of mystery. There are a number of reasons as to why this might be the case.

A few of the main obstacles to our understanding of autonomy have been 1) our inability to accurately pinpoint and determine the qualities inherent in autonomy in a definition; 2) the fact that there have been relatively few attempts to create some kind of model or framework for autonomy which could act as guidelines for teachers in their attempts at promoting it, and 3) because of its relatively obscure and abstract nature, until recently autonomy had proved very difficult for researchers, teachers and

¹ The title of the paper was inspired by the song with the title ‘What is this thing called love?’, music and lyrics by Cole Porter. It was composed in 1929 for the musical revue ‘Wake Up and Dream’, which was staged both in London and Broadway.
learners alike to measure or quantify. Fortunately, significant progress (Cooker 2012; Murase 2012; Tassinari 2012) has now been made in this direction and a number of tools, instruments and models have been created which permit assessment of autonomy and measurement of particular qualities, which characterise it.

What follows is an account of some of the difficulties related both to researching autonomy and putting it into practice. This will foreground the exploratory journey taken by the researcher to find a definition and model which would, retrospectively, satisfactorily match both the aims and achievements of the AARP, 2005-2010.

1.1 Researching autonomy

The concept of autonomy in language learning, despite its complexity, has become an increasingly popular area within which to conduct research. What researchers encounter, however, is a bewildering array of terms and terminology (Wright 2005; Jiménez Raya, Lamb & Vieira 2007) which have been used to refer to what seems to be autonomy, among them, self-directed learning (Candy 1991; Dickinson 1987), learner independence (Benson & Voller 1997), self-regulation (Schunk & Zimmerman 1994), self-managed learning (Harrison 2000), learner-centredness (Tudor 1996), individualisation (McDonough & Shaw 1993) and, more recently, personal leadership (Farrar 2007).

This is not to say that things are very much clearer for researchers when the term being used is, in fact, autonomy. This is because the concept is applied in very many contexts and situations and not everyone agrees as to its inherent qualities and, consequently, how it should be defined.

Holec’s (1981: 3) classic definition describes autonomy as an “ability”, but he also refers to it as a “capacity”. Allwright (1990: 1) regards it as a “state of optimal equilibrium”, between inner and outer resources, while Little (1995: 13) views it as a “fundamental behavioural capacity”. Breen & Mann (1997: 134) openly disagree with Holec’s view of autonomy as an “ability” and see it, rather, as “a way of being in the world” (authors’ emphasis). Jiménez Raya et al. (2007: 33) believe that the exercise of autonomy involves a number of “competences”, Noels (2009: 302) sees it as a “human propensity” which may flourish or fade, depending on circumstances, and Benson (2009: 18) subscribes to the notion of autonomy as a composite of “abilities, attitudes or dispositions.”
Further compounding the problem of defining autonomy is the tendency for researchers to attach ‘labels’ to the word autonomy, so that Smith (2002: 18) refers to “weak” and “strong” autonomy, Littlewood (1999: 75-76) to “reactive” and “proactive” autonomy and Kumaravadivelu (2003: 141) to “academic” and “liberatory” autonomy, whereas Benson (2006: 24) speaks of progression from “lower” levels of autonomy, to “higher”. In each instance, reference is made to two ‘types’ of autonomy, with each researcher seemingly describing the same two ‘types’ using different nomenclature (Everhard 2015).

Indeed, it is also fairly common practice for researchers to talk about “versions” of autonomy (Thanasopoulos 2000), with Benson (1997) referring to technical, psychological and political versions of autonomy, to which Oxford (2003) adds a fourth, which is socio-cultural. If we look beyond the field of linguistics, then Ecclestone (2002) adds what she sees as three types of autonomy, namely: procedural, personal and critical. Thus, the researcher is faced with what Thanasopoulos (2000) describes as “innumerable definitions of autonomy and other synonyms for it” between which they have to find commonalities and similar points of reference, which is no easy matter.

1.2 Putting autonomy into practice

When it comes to putting autonomy into practice, it is clear that many different ideas have been developed and used, but the practitioner is likely to be bewildered by the variety and range of experimentation and will undoubtedly experience difficulty in deciding what approach to select. One of the reasons for this bewilderment is that there is no one particular methodology which is guaranteed to lead to autonomy, but rather “only general guidelines by which one can seek to determine the content and shape the process of learning” (Little 1994: 439). What this means essentially is that there are “many different paths that can be followed in developing learner autonomy in language learning” (Natri 2007: 109) and we also have to contend with the fact that “moving towards autonomy is a bumpy ride where contradictions, uncertainty, and conflicts are obstacles to be expected and overcome” (Auerbach 2007: 87).

Here we will examine some of the “many different”, but popular “paths” which have been explored in the past three or four decades, some of them ‘bumpier’ than others. One route, which became very popular as a means to promote autonomy was that of self-access, and the last two decades of the 20th century witnessed a
mushrooming of such centres within British Council worldwide teaching operations and within some of the larger language school operatives in the U.K., such as Bell, Eurocentres and International House. The institution which was then known as CRAPEL, at what was the University of Nancy II, France, also became well-known for its experimentation with self-access resources from the 1970s onwards. Some of these SACs came to be regarded as centres of excellence, and received many visitors because of their organization of materials, equipment, staffing and space.

With the advent of computers, CALL, and, more particularly, laptops, tablets and hand-held devices, the emphasis shifted away from conventional spaces and resources to the programs and applications, which could be exploited for language learning almost anywhere, anytime. While some state-of-the-art self-access facilities still exist, the emphasis within these resources has shifted very much to advising learners and assisting them in making the best use of available resources to suit their own particular needs.

Another route that has had many proponents is that of learning strategy training. Sometimes training is embedded into particular courses of study (Sinclair 2009), or intensive strategy training can be offered at the beginning of a course or at particular stages in a course (Ellis & Sinclair 1989; Brown 1989) or some kind of organizer can be used in conjunction with a course to help raise awareness among learners (Smith & Smith 1998) and encourage more strategic learning. While many FL coursebooks now incorporate resources at the back of the books to encourage strategic development, it is generally left to the class instructor to incorporate strategy training into a course as and when necessary. Since, in Greece, there is a large emphasis on exam-taking and certification (Prodromou 1995; Sifakis & Sougari 2010; Spyropoulou 2006), these learning strategies are often reduced to cramming or test-taking techniques.

An approach, which genuinely seems to promote a sense of ownership of learning, is portfolio learning, which essentially provides an opportunity to learners to showcase their work and achievements in a form which is on public display to teachers, parents and peers alike.

Such were the convictions as to the usefulness of this approach in encouraging reflection, self-evaluation and fostering autonomy that within the Council of Europe and the ECML a great deal of funding went into the creation of the European Language Portfolio, to be used in conjunction with the CEFR, and in promotion of its use. Despite the impressive logistics of the number of countries, coordinators and of
teachers involved in this project and the research derived from it, it would seem that when coordination and funding ceased, its exploitation and integration into everyday teaching practices, throughout Europe, also ceased (Becker 2013).

The use of logbooks, journals and diaries has also had its proponents, with the idea of logbooks first being developed by Dam (1995) of Denmark and taken up by her protégés Lacey (2008, 2011) and Asmussen (2012), also based in Denmark. Burkert (2012) of the University of Graz, Austria, also reports successful use of logbooks and diaries with her undergraduate students of EFL, following the procedures set out by Dam, and research conducted both by Little (1997) and Legenhausen (2012) speak highly of the effectiveness of Dam’s processes and procedures. Issues relating to transferability of these processes to other pedagogical and cultural settings have perhaps inhibited their more widespread deployment.

Interesting developments in CALL and use of the internet, offering facilities such as Online Self-access Centres (OSACS) and blended learning, seem conducive to greater learner autonomy, while, more recently, the exploitation of holes-in-the-wall (Mitra 2013) and hand-held devices (Lamb 2013) seem to open up opportunities for autonomous learning on the streets, amongst the impoverished and underprivileged masses, on the one hand, and amongst the populations of remote, scantly-populated mountain villages in India and forest areas of Jakarta, respectively, on the other.

Another path that has been less well exploited is that of peer- and self-assessment and its link to autonomy. Everhard-Theophilidou (2012) conducted doctoral research on the exploitation of peer- and self-assessment in both speaking and writing skills as a means to promote a greater degree of autonomy in students majoring in EFL in higher education and reports success (Everhard 2012a, 2012b, 2013c), as shown by both qualitative and quantitative data, particularly with respect to speaking skills. A literature review conducted during the years 2004-2011 and reported in Everhard-Theophilidou (2012) revealed a serious lack of reporting of investigations into learner-centred assessment and of explorations to measure the importance and significance of the assessment-autonomy relationship.

1.3 Identifying the underlying characteristics of autonomy
Previously, the lack of agreement on a definition of autonomy was mentioned, but perhaps, even more importantly, there have been few attempts 1) to identify and consolidate, within the autonomy literature, areas of agreement and consensus with
What is this thing called autonomy?

regard to what autonomy is; and, likewise, 2) there does not seem to have been an attempt to identify the key elements or constituent qualities which are required in order for autonomy to flourish or prevail in the learning environment.

With regard to areas of consensus, an examination of listings by Benson (2001, 2009), Little (1990, 1991), Sinclair (2000), Karlsson, Kjisik & Nordlund (1997), and Huang (2009), taken together, indicate twenty-three areas of agreement, to which Everhard-Theophilidou (2012) adds another seven, making thirty in total. It is possible that further investigation might reveal more areas of consensus, but this list of thirty could certainly form a basis for further discussion.

While constituent qualities or elements essential for the development of autonomy, such as reflection (Dam & Little 1998; Huttunen 2003; Little & Dam 1998), self-assessment (Little 1999a, 1999b, 2005a, 2005b, 2009) and critical thinking (Boud 1996) have often been looked at in isolation, again there seem to have been few attempts to identify them in their totality and group these elements together. Everhard-Theophilidou (2012), drawing on evidence from the literature, identifies four constituent elements in autonomy as 1) identity, 2) reflection, 3) ownership and 4) self-determination (for an analysis, see Everhard 2012c). Establishing these, assisted both in defining autonomy as practised in the AARP, and in finding a suitable model of autonomy. To these, she has more recently added a fifth element, which is that of 5) authenticity (Everhard 2013b).

2. The nature of the AARP

The aims and conditions under which the pedagogy and research behind the AARP were conducted have been described elsewhere (Everhard 2012a, 2012b, 2013c; Everhard-Theophilidou 2012). Essentially it was a five-year research project with a Pre-Study 2005-2006, a Main Study 2006-2009 and a Post-Study 2009-2010, the aims of which were to implement anonymous solo peer-assessment of writing assignments and anonymous group peer-assessment of speaking assignments, using pre-determined criterial checklists. After their experience of peer-assessment, it was hoped that the checklists would be utilised in the same objective, criterial and critical manner to self-assess their own performances in writing and speaking. Thus, the approach taken was that of learning by doing, during the first four years of the project.

Peer-assessors of writing were invested with the same degree of power and control as the instructor since they were required to make corrections, give praise where it
was due and make suggestions for improvement. They were required to use the pre-determined criterial checklists, which had five holistic criteria on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, from very weak to very strong, to calculate the final grade awarded. In the case of writing, the weighting of the final assignment grade was divided equally between Peer, Self and Instructor. In the case of speaking, where students delivered a 5-minute presentation before their class-mates, prepared at home, the Peer grade constituted the mean of all the grades which Peers awarded. Equal weighting was assigned, therefore, to the Peer Mean, Self and Instructor grades in calculating the final grade for speaking.

The ability to self-assess is recognised by many to be an essential element in the process of “autonomization” (Holec 1985; Hunt, Gow & Barnes 1989), but when the educational system promotes heteronomy over autonomy and when assessment is usually teacher- or authority-directed, opportunities to self-assess are rare. Moreover, moves toward a recalibration of assessment power, which put both responsibility and trust in the hands of the learners, could be a risky business which might be subject to abuse. Nevertheless, such risks have to be weighed against the possible gains to both the learners and the instructor of:

1) greater clarity regarding the aims of assignments and the course overall
2) greater transparency and honesty with regard to standards and requirements both concerning individual assignments and the course as a whole
3) ownership of the criteria, ownership of the assignments, ownership of the language and of the resources available to them
4) greater criterial awareness and critical understanding, leading to objectivity
5) greater understanding of how to meet targets and achieve course goals
6) greater motivation and enthusiasm for learning
7) greater self-awareness and recognition of strengths and weaknesses
8) less dependence on the instructor for spoon-feeding.

Dickinson (1987) believes that there is no doubt that learners ‘can’ self-assess, but the question is, rather, whether they ‘will’ self-assess. He suggests giving learners practice for self-assessment using “frozen data” produced by peers in past years (Dickinson 1992: 35). This suggestion was followed in the case of the AARP Post-Study, which involved intervention exercises (IEs). Frozen data was indeed used to offer training in peer-assessment of writing, before proceeding to the usual peer- and
self-assessment. This was done with a view to seeing if such training could make a difference to how learners approached, conducted and accomplished the assessment task. Five samples of writing were given for assessment purposes and two copies of each were made, one for submission and one for discussion at the next meeting of the class. Participants discussed with the teacher the strengths and weaknesses of each sample and what each deserved in terms of criteria scales and overall grades. Learners were able to compare their assessments with each other and with the instructor.

When it came to speaking assessment in the Post-Study, again training was implemented, this time using older student volunteers who selected a range of interesting topics and presented in a variety of styles. In the next class meeting, the strengths and weaknesses of each presentation, the scoring of criteria and the grades awarded were discussed openly amongst peers and the teacher. It was hoped that this training would influence both future peer-assessment and self-assessment of oral presentations.

Rather surprisingly, despite evidence of alignment with the instructor in IEs in both writing and speaking assessment in the Post-Study, there did not appear to be any changes in subsequent peer-assessment and self-assessment behaviour from previous years when no training was offered (Everhard 2013c). This seems to show that previously the practice for self-assessment through peer-assessment offered was sufficient. Till now, there do not appear to have been any research studies which have been able to reveal, with empirical evidence that training in peer-assessment makes a significant difference to assessment performance.

What was important about the AARP was the fact that the same opportunities were offered to all, without discrimination. Through greater involvement in the assessment process, learners were offered a greater degree of autonomy. Whether the learners decided to avail themselves of this opportunity was up to them. What was needed, in retrospect, was a definition and a model of autonomy for the AARP that would make this transparent, more visible and quantifiable, not just to the parties involved, but would make clearer the aims, goals and achievements to other practitioners and researchers.

3. The search for a definition of autonomy for the AARP

In the introduction of her PhD thesis, Everhard-Theophilidou (2012) poses the problem of finding a definition and a model for the AARP as two research pre-
questions, but, in effect, it might be more accurate to describe them as research postquestions. This is because first the research was embarked on and then, based on observations and results, the appropriate definition and model were sought.

Following what has been discussed in Sections 1 and 2, it should be clear that given the myriad of definitions available, it was felt to be important to find a definition which would at one and the same time:

- accommodate the universal features of autonomy and the autonomous learner (universal in ethos)
- pay heed to the local conditions of the AARP (local in its applicability)
- allow for learner differences and permit of variations in disposition and uptake
- allow us to view engagement with autonomous language learning as varying in degrees
- be sensitive to the cultural climate in which the research was conducted and the learning community of which the learners and the instructor formed a part.

Thus, the researcher aimed to find a definition which would be somewhat ‘glocalised’ (Schmenk, 2005) in nature.

The whole of the autonomy literature was examined for definitions of autonomy. From the many found, five were selected for closer scrutiny, these being Holec (1981), Little (1991), Breen & Mann (1997), Macaro (1997) and Allwright (1990). Holec’s definition was examined simply because it must be the most frequently-cited in the literature, but although that may be the case, Benson (2009: 18) feels there is cause to question just what the word ‘ability’ in “the ability to take charge of one’s learning” entails and he believes that if we attempt to define autonomy at all, then it must be, as previously mentioned, as “a composite of abilities, attitudes or dispositions” (Benson 2009: 18, author’s emphasis). It was with Benson’s (ibid) stipulations in mind that a suitable definition was sought.

Little (1991: 4) comes close to the behaviours required of the learner-assessors on the AARP when he defines autonomy as “…a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action.” Unlike other research projects where a lot of assessment was done either through or after processes of discussion and collaboration, on the AARP, learners were required to think for themselves, undistracted, uninfluenced and undisturbed by others. This was deemed necessary if an atmosphere of objectivity and clear, critical thinking was to prevail.
As mentioned previously in Section 2, Breen & Mann (1997: 134) dare to critique Holec, saying “…autonomy is not an ability that has to be learnt, but a way of being that has to be discovered or rediscovered”. This view of autonomy is clearly a demanding one, but shows us that it is not something that can be achieved through spoon-feeding, but rather one has to find oneself, be that person and be true to oneself.

Like Holec (1981: 3), Macaro (1997) also sees autonomy as an “ability”, which he believes can be learned, but shares with Little (1991) the view that this ‘ability’ involves decision-making – “…an ability which is learnt through knowing how to make decisions about the self as well as being allowed to make those decisions” (Macaro 1997: 168, author’s emphasis). These were key elements in the AARP. Macaro (ibid) confirms Holec’s (ibid) view of autonomy as the “ability to take charge of one’s own language learning”, but he also adds a list of other abilities involved:

- an ability to recognise the value of taking responsibility for one’s objectives, content, progress, method and techniques of learning
- an ability to be responsible for the pace and rhythm of learning
- an ability to be responsible for the evaluation of the learning process

It seems that this would be difficult to achieve in one academic semester, which was the actual duration of the AARP, but certainly worth striving for.

Allwright (1990: 1), on the other hand, sees autonomy as a ‘state’ in which the learner has achieved “optimal equilibrium between dependence and self-sufficiency”, but he makes clear exactly what such an ‘equilibrium’ entails. It means developing one’s inner resources to the full, but at the same time finding a balance between:

- inner and external resources, whether human or material
- cognitive and affective domains
- the individual and social aspects of both these domains.

All five of these definitions or parts of definitions helped to throw light on what should be included in the AARP definition, but these were verified further by Paiva’s (2006) Only Paiva & Brage 2008]definition, which is influenced by chaos and complexity theories. Like Allwright (ibid), Paiva’s definition points to internal and external affordances or constraints, and like Little (ibid) and Macaro (ibid) it includes decision-making, choices and assessment, but also adds that, among other things, it is “dynamic”, “chaotic” and “unpredictable”. Paiva’s definition therefore comes very close to what is desirable for the AARP, which was put together as follows:
Autonomy is a way of being and a sense of self which is achieved through acquiring the ability to cooperatively make decisions about one’s own learning and that of others and which is exercised by being allowed to make and execute those decisions through access to both internal and external resources. The degree of autonomy achieved and exercised varies according to the disposition and predisposition of the learners in terms of affect, motivation, commitment, engagement, interaction, cooperativeness, ownership, reflection and uptake, and fluctuates according to circumstances.

Everhard-Theophilidou (2012)

Table 1. The AARP definition of autonomy

4. The search for a model of autonomy for the AARP

As mentioned previously in Section 3, the search for a model for the AARP began when the research was well underway. Thus, it was not a case of completing the research according to a pre-specified model, but rather finding a model which both fit the research and was befitting of the research.

As with the definition, there were a number of specifications, which the AARP model would have to satisfy, namely:

- it should be able to accommodate existing theory related to autonomous language learning
- it should clarify the pedagogical implications of autonomy in practice
- it should provide a ‘visual metaphor’ (Oxford, 2008), aiding our understanding, but avoiding over-simplification
- it should show heteronomy-autonomy in language learning as being on a continuum, thus allowing for progression, regression and fluctuation
- it should accommodate learner-centred assessment theory, and in particular, Harris & Bell’s (1990) autonomy-assessment continuum (see Everhard 2013a)
- it should make clear the role played by learners, their peers, the instructor and the institution
Clearly, such a long list of requirements proved difficult to meet and satisfy.

4.1 Comparing models for suitability

Several models were examined for their suitability for the AARP based on the criteria listed above. Some models (such as those discussed by Benson 2006) were automatically dismissed as unsuitable because they did not meet the criterion of being diagrammatic or pictorial. The four main contenders remaining were Nunan (1997, 2000), van Lier (1996), Littlewood (1996, 1997) and Kohonen (2001).

Nunan’s (ibid) model, when inverted to allow insertion of a heteronomy-autonomy continuum, was very simple and very tempting, particularly if interpreted in conjunction with Nunan’s (2000) conceptualisation of the learner as being on a progressive journey of learnership and ‘autonomization’, from “apprentice” to “competent” practitioner to “master” practitioner. The only problem with his model is that although Nunan takes the view that autonomy in language learning is:

1) a matter of degree
2) on a continuum
3) something which can be developed in learners,

he seems to view autonomy as developing in progressive stages which are in step with the learners’ progression with the language, a view which is dismissed by Kumaravadivelu (2003) and conflicts with the commonly-held view that autonomy fluctuates (Little, 1990, 1991; Sinclair, 2000). The fact that Oxford (2008) modifies Nunan’s model by adding a ‘zero’ stage to the existing five stages, does not really resolve this problem. Thus, Nunan’s model (see Everhard 2013a) had to be rejected.

van Lier’s (1996) model looked interesting, based on the three ‘As’ of Awareness, Autonomy and Authenticity forming concentric, but at the same time, overlapping circles, in what seems to be a spiral formation. On either side of the spirals are two lines which seem to form continua, showing increasing cognitive and meta-cognitive skills. Awareness seems to feed into Autonomy, which, in turn, feeds into Authenticity and ‘intake’ and ‘engagement’ are emphasised where the circles appear to overlap. Although very interesting as a conceptualisation of autonomous language learning processes, unfortunately, van Lier’s model does not seem to encapsulate the processes of the AARP, essentially because the fourth A, of assessment, has been omitted from the model.
Littlewood’s (1996, 1997) model is also a very interesting visualisation of autonomy in language learning, particularly as it emphasizes three ‘types’ of autonomy: 1) as a learner, 2) as a person and 3) as a communicator, placed at three different points on a circle, with motivation, confidence, knowledge and skills lying at the heart of these, in the centre of the circle. There is a continuum of sorts round the circumference of the circle, but again assessment, which lies at the heart of the AARP, does not appear in Littlewood’s configuration.

Kohonen’s (2001) experiential model of autonomy focuses on the learner’s personal awareness, process awareness and task awareness, which are linked to the cycle of – Experience – Reflect – Conceptualise – Apply, as well as to the teacher’s professional awareness and the culture of the learning institution and society. This model is rather unique in that it takes the role of the instructor, the institution and even society into account, and self-assessment is given significance under process awareness, but degrees of autonomy and clear continua are absent, making the application of this model and its applicability to the AARP hard to follow.

Since none of the four contenders proved suitable, one final model was considered, which does show degrees of autonomy and which incorporates Dam (1995) and Little’s (1996, 1999a) questions. It was that of Dickinson, which first appears in Harding-Esch (1976), later in Holec (1981) and then in Dickinson (1987). Although this model appears to match the requirements listed for the AARP model in many aspects, particularly with regard to degrees of autonomy, Dickinson chooses to have two continua running in parallel referred to as ‘self-directed choice’ and ‘externally directed’, which makes it appear as an either/or situation with nothing lying in between. In fact, we can see what Dickinson visualises between the two extremes of self-directed and externally-directed, as within the horizontal continua there are also vertical continua with notches which describe various gradations. Having these vertical continua within parallel horizontal continua makes this model appear complicated and awkward to consult. In addition, the Monitoring column is redundant for the AARP since monitoring was not something that was highlighted or measured and might cause confusion by being included; thus, Dickinson’s model was also rejected.

For this reason, the researcher looked beyond the field of linguistics and found a model designed for the lifelong learning of engineers, which could be modified to suit the purposes of the AARP.
4.2 The proposed AARP model

The model selected as most suited to the requirements of the AARP was one designed by Stolk, Martello & Geddes (2007), since it accommodated the heteronomy-autonomy (colour) continuum as well as Dam (1995) and Little’s (1996, 1999a) four questions, with the fourth, regarding assessment, given some strengthening to suit the AARP. Given its 2-dimensional format (see Appendix 1), the model conveys reasonably well the idea of degrees of autonomy and, equally well, the idea of the possibility of progression, regression, undulation and fluctuation with regard to autonomy in the language learning process. It is important to mention that Schmenk (2006) does not approve of the idea of a continuum between heteronomy and autonomy, but it should be noted that in her continuum, arrows are moving in only one direction, while the AARP continuum (see Everhard 2013c) has arrows pointing outwards at both ends, showing that changes can be in both directions.

Its usefulness lies in the fact that it is not prescriptive and offers flexibility. It is a model which is relevant to all learning and teaching situations, whether face-to-face or online, or a combination of both. It demonstrates clearly how a course or series of courses could be designed and run, with greater control by the teacher in the beginning stages, with support and scaffolding, giving way to greater uptake and responsibility of the learners for making choices concerning their learning and a gradual yielding of control to learners. At the same time, this model, while illustrating that there are degrees of autonomy, also provides a picture of what is likely to happen in any given (language) learning situation. Although every opportunity may be provided for learners to achieve autonomy, in the end it will be a matter for each individual to decide how willing and able they are to take maximum advantage of the opportunities provided. There will always be some who, for a number of reasons, do not choose to be autonomous.

5. Conclusion

As can be gathered from the descriptions in Sections 3 and 4 above, the search for a definition and a model appropriate to the AARP was not an easy task, but finally both a definition and model were found that accommodated both the local and the global, helping to identify the project as essentially ‘glocal’ (Schmenk 2005: 115) and enabling the theoretical and practical aspects of the research project to sit comfortably together. The fact that the AARP definition and model are ‘glocal’ in nature does not
preclude them from being adopted or adapted to learning, teaching and living in other contexts. Having a clear definition and model can be reassuring for teachers and help them in seeking out suitable activities and resources to help their learners on their path to autonomy and in encouraging particular behaviours in the learning environment.

Practitioners and researchers should not be dissuaded or discouraged from the pursuit of autonomy because of the “bumpy” nature of the route or the “obstacles” they encounter (Auerbach 2007: 87), nor should they pay attention to those who describe autonomy as “utopian” or as some kind of unattainable “ideal” (Dingle & McKenzie 2001: 104). It is possible that with clearer definitions and models of autonomy, enabling us to better qualify and quantify it, that those who are genuinely interested in promoting autonomy in the classroom will feel empowered and inspired, and, in the words of the songwriter and lyricist, Cole Porter, may take up the challenge and dare to “wake up and dream”.

References


Lamb, M. 2013. *Blackberries in the forest: Technology and autonomous learning in rural areas*. IATEFL Learner Autonomy Special Interest Group Pre-Conference Event, IATEFL 47th Annual Conference and Exhibition. 8th April, 2013, Liverpool ACC, U.K.


What is this thing called autonomy?


Schmenk, B. 2006. CALL, self-access and learner autonomy: A linear process from heteronomy to autonomy? In T. Harden, A. Witte & D. Köhler (eds), *The concept of progression in the teaching and learning of foreign languages*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 75-90.


**Filmography**


**Musicography**

Porter, C. 1929. What is this thing called love? In C. Porter, *Wake up and dream*. First performed 30th December, 1929.
# APPENDIX 1

The proposed AARP model: Degrees of autonomy in foreign language learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of Responsibility for Language Learning</th>
<th>Intellectual heteronomy</th>
<th>Academic Autonomy</th>
<th>Academic Autonomy</th>
<th>Intellectual autonomy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Areas of Responsibility for Language Learning</td>
<td>NO AUTONOMY</td>
<td>LOW DEGREE OF AUTONOMY</td>
<td>MEDIUM DEGREE OF AUTONOMY</td>
<td>HIGH DEGREE OF AUTONOMY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHAT? Content, knowledge, skills</td>
<td>Language instructor designs the syllabus and designates the list of language items and skills to be learned</td>
<td>Language instructor identifies language learning needs and provides problem statements</td>
<td>Collaborative identification of language learning needs or problems</td>
<td>Learners identify learning problems/ needs and organize necessary knowledge or skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language Instructor or institution or higher authority selects course materials</td>
<td>Language instructor defines learning content, skills and language acquisition goals</td>
<td>Language acquisition goals are flexible and collaboratively planned and modified</td>
<td>Learners establish language content acquisition goals based on defined needs and objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language instructor determines pace, mode and style of instruction</td>
<td>Low levels of ambiguity or problem-solving in learning content</td>
<td>Language instructor defines broad constraints and uses exploratory/ problem-solving approaches</td>
<td>Learners select appropriate materials and comfortable pace of learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHY? Motivation, context</td>
<td>A motivation or extrinsic motivation</td>
<td>Extrinsic motivation with some student regulation based on perceived task value</td>
<td>Balance of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation</td>
<td>Intrinsic motivation derived from curiosity, passion, interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emphasis on rote-learning and memorisation of facts, with little experimentation or practical application</td>
<td>Framework for language learning context provided by instructor, with connection points</td>
<td>Instructor in touch with student needs, background and interests</td>
<td>Learners relate activities to broader social and cultural contexts and values, making links with the real world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning context as defined by the language teacher or syllabus</td>
<td>Collaborative development of motivating context and personal, meaningful connections</td>
<td>Collaborative exploration and interdependence</td>
<td>Learners internalize and value the learning context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOW? Strategies, process</td>
<td>Language instructor provides learning resources, the learning plan and the scaffolding. Language instructor assigns tasks, readings and goals, offering minimum choice and selection. Minimal development of alternative solutions, schemes of work and learner ownership and responsibility.</td>
<td>Language instructor as a resource, facilitator, enabler, and guide. Collaborative development of learning plan, structure and scaffolding. Language instructor encourages multiple solutions and guides construction of meaning and understanding as required. Negotiation with other learners and instructor, using inner and outer resources. Shared ownership and responsibility.</td>
<td>Instructor as counsellor. Learners choose own learning pathway. Learners identify and evaluate learning resources. Learners select and implement strategies to make use of resources. Learners initiate and manage the learning process. Learners’ ownership of learning and language.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The learning pathway is clearly defined by the language instructor. Emphasis is on reproduction of language instructor’s methods. Learners follow instructor’s directions. Language instructor provides learning approach and solutions. Ownership lies with instructor.</td>
<td>Language instructor suggests multiple strategies and approaches. Language instructor provides the learning resources, the learning plan and the scaffolding. Language instructor as a resource, facilitator, enabler, and guide. Collaborative development of learning plan, structure and scaffolding. Language instructor encourages multiple solutions and guides construction of meaning and understanding as required. Negotiation with other learners and instructor, using inner and outer resources. Shared ownership and responsibility.</td>
<td>Language instructor as a resource, facilitator, enabler, and guide. Collaborative development of learning plan, structure and scaffolding. Language instructor encourages multiple solutions and guides construction of meaning and understanding as required. Negotiation with other learners and instructor, using inner and outer resources. Shared ownership and responsibility.</td>
<td>Instructor as counsellor. Learners choose own learning pathway. Learners identify and evaluate learning resources. Learners select and implement strategies to make use of resources. Learners initiate and manage the learning process. Learners’ ownership of learning and language.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Based on Stolk, Martello & Geddes (2007), Dam (1995) and Little (1996, 1999a)