

From Toy to Tool: Designing Joyful AI-Enhanced Multimodal Language Learning

This keynote examines how generative AI can move beyond its early status as a technological novelty and become a purposeful tool for cultivating joyful, meaningful, and multimodal language learning. Drawing on design-based work across higher education and K–12 settings, the talk positions joy as a dynamic pedagogical force—a blend of emotional connection, curiosity, challenge, and transformation that supports attention, resilience, and sustained motivation. Rather than equating joy with entertainment or ease, the keynote underscores its deeper role in shaping humanizing classroom environments where learners feel empowered to explore, express, and grow.

The presentation introduces a four-dimensional joy-based framework for AI-enhanced language learning. The first dimension, Connection, highlights the relational foundation of joyful pedagogy, where AI-supported multimodal experiences can strengthen students' sense of belonging and provide personalized entry points that honor diverse identities. The second dimension, AI-Powered Creation, views AI as a medium for expressive production, enabling learners to construct multimodal artefacts that deepen comprehension and invite richer forms of meaning-making. The third dimension, Playfulness with rigor, emphasizes the productive interplay between exploration and challenge, showing how AI-enabled tasks can encourage experimentation, linguistic risk-taking, and inquiry while maintaining clear learning intentions. The fourth dimension, Celebration and Sustainability, focuses on recognizing incremental progress, offering timely and responsive feedback, and supporting teacher well-being by reducing cognitive load and expanding creative agency.

Taken together, these dimensions illustrate how joy can serve as an intentional design principle for integrating AI in ways that enrich, rather than replace, human interaction. Ultimately, the keynote argues that AI's educational value lies in its capacity to nurture joyful learning communities, amplify multimodal expression, and empower educators and learners to engage with language in more personally meaningful and fulfilling ways. ng learners to use technology not simply to acquire an L2, but to cultivate and transform their own humanity in the process.