

## A cosmopolitan perspective on learning and teaching English

Xiaoye You, *Cosmopolitan English and Transliteracy*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2016. Pp. xii + 284. Paperback \$40, ISBN: 978-0-809-33524-4.

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In this book, You addresses the issue of cosmopolitan English (CE), ‘English as it is actually used by individuals across the globe, each with differences inflected in his or her pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax, and/or discourse structures’ (p. 10), and transliteracy ‘a translingual and transcultural practice with a cosmopolitan imperative’ (p. 20). Cosmopolitanism is concerned with global justice and ethics, and involves ‘intercultural openness on a trans-national stage’ (Holton, 2009: 117). The differences within a community are global, while making every individual count and be accountable (Sanahuju & Ghia, 2015). You calls for ‘a cosmopolitan turn in writing studies, a turn toward taking on cultivating global citizens as our shared mission’ (p. 18). You offers many examples of how CE is used in transnational virtual communities and how he incorporates the English pedagogy of transliteracy in his teaching.

This book consists of eight chapters. Chapters 2-3 explore how different community members use English along with other symbolic resources to establish a cosmopolitan ethos and hybrid identities through online communities; Chapter 4 focuses on multilingual writers’ transliterate creativity in the literature of globalization; the remaining chapters examine the CE pedagogy in university classrooms located in the United States and China.

In the introductory chapter, You briefly explains the concepts of cosmopolitanism, the ethics of globalization, cosmopolitan English, the pedagogy of transliteracy, and the main issues tackled in the subsequent chapters. Challenging the norms of interlanguage, world Englishes, and English as a lingua franca, You advocates CE, ‘a multiplicity of local practices constantly converging and intermingling with other linguistic and cultural forces’ (p. 18), a term that is both descriptive and heuristic.

Based on the observation of an English-using online community in Japan, You investigates the construction of ethos in the context of CE cyberspace in Chapter 2. The online community comprises Anglo-American authors, Japanese university professors, high school teachers, businessmen, and housewives who are interested in the ‘Start with Simple Stories’ method of reading English. In the interaction of members, cultural synthesis and blending of languages, values, experiences and emotions play an essential role in the ethical reformulation which helps resolve conflicts and tensions arising in cultural encounters, and generates cosmopolitan consciousness and connections among the members. CE brings people of different cultures and nations together and helps them develop new identities and achieve shared goals.

Chapter 3 explores the linguistic creativity in the Chinese white collar diaspora over a 21<sup>st</sup>-century community Internet forum. The author discusses the concepts of Chinese English, domestic diaspora, diasporic social relations, and cultural production of the diaspora. In relation to linguistic practices of the white-collar diaspora, CE is considered a better alternative for understanding English use among cultural and ethnic groups, because their use of English has developed outside traditional physical boundaries. Addressing multilingual audiences, forum members blend multiple linguistic and cultural symbol systems, rather than fixing their identities to a particular culture, language, or location (p. 79). Their linguistic creativity is highlighted by the use of figures of speech and appropriation of local and translocal discourse



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strategies. This chapter demonstrates the mobility of people strongly associated with unstable, fluid linguistic and cultural hybridity.

Chapter 4 investigates the transliterate creativity of multilingual writers in the literature of globalization through reading Raja Rao's (1967) *Kanthapura*, Xiaolu Guo's (2007) *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers*, and Sapphire's (1997) *Push*. Engaging a global readership interested in decolonization and national independence, *Kanthapura* reflects the idea of 'diversity in unity' of Indianness, blurring lingual and dialectal boundaries with Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, and modern regional languages fused in it. Integrating the forms of a diary and an annotated dictionary, Guo's work depicts a young Chinese woman's transnational travel, translingually and transculturally. Fostering a cosmopolitan ethic, Sapphire mingles multiple languages and writing styles in her novel, such as street language of New York City and African American Vernacular English, to construct a working-class African American woman struggling to survive.

Chapters 5-8 illustrate the pedagogical practices of CE and transliteracy in local and global contexts. Based on a study at an American university-style summer school in Shanghai, China, Chapter 5 discusses how subject teachers helped students cross literacy regimes, 'structures of distribution, access, value, and use of literacy resources' (p. 23). The author analyzes the literacy challenges the students face in moving through scales in the literacy regimes and suggests strategies for making space for grassroots literacy: adjusting writing tasks, providing support for writing assignments, valuing students' multilingual resources, and connecting to local cultures. Human agency is considered essential for the unprivileged students to move between literacy regimes. To enable students to do so, content teachers and academic programs need to work more closely together. Chapter 6 investigates three multilingual students in an English for Academic Purpose (EAP) class and discusses how the author helped them develop transliteracy in their composing process. In Chapter 7, through tracing two American students' writing practices in an English Studies course, You examines the ability of the students in making translingual choices, blending styles, tones, and cultures in their writing assignments.

Chapter 8 explores teacher development from a CE perspective. The author proposes a cross-border model, in which teachers and multilingual writers are mediated by communication technologies, such as electronic bulletin boards, blogs, emails, instant messaging, teleconferencing, phones, etc. Teachers are expected to cross the borders between teaching native and non-native multilingual writers, between the teachers' language learning and teaching experiences, between writing programs

worldwide. You illustrates this model using a case study conducted involving a U.S. university and a Chinese university.

*Cosmopolitan English and Transliteracy* contributes not only to composition studies, but to breaking down borders and connecting the world in the teaching of English. It raises our awareness of mobility by emphasizing the fact that English is dynamic and fluid rather than discrete or static and stresses the rhetorical potential of increasing symbolic resources available to individuals. A cosmopolitan outlook encourages writers to re-evaluate assumptions and prejudices, and to explore ways in which writing might transcend the dehumanizing aspects of globalization (Surma, 2013). Racial, class, gender, and ethnic biases are not an indisputable fact of language and life; only when they are demystified does transliteracy become an achievable goal. The author demonstrates this possibility through his classroom studies.

The pedagogy of transliteracy proposed by You is also of practical significance. As globalization deepens, teachers and learners of English are faced with multilingual resources. To make the best use of them, English pedagogy should meet demands. The teaching methods suggested in this book such as cross-border activity are helpful in formulating, cultivating, and promoting a dynamic concept of cosmopolitanism.

However, as research is still in its infancy and its characteristics remain only loosely defined, CE still faces significant challenges if it is to be more widely adopted. How to evaluate its effectiveness in teaching is still to be explored and, unfortunately, You pays little attention to this in the book, focusing rather on the methodology of ethnography. If a 'cosmopolitan' research approach can be employed with more quantitative data added, the book will contribute more methodologically, whether to English teaching or composition studies.

All in all, this book successfully fills a gap by providing a cosmopolitan perspective on learning and teaching English with transliteracy. It provides a new perspective on transliteracy instruction, drawing attention to the need to break down the lingual and cultural boundaries; a prerequisite for establishing cosmopolitanism. It warrants careful reading by English teachers and scholars as well as program administrators in higher education.

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