

## *Book review*

*Transforming literacies and language: Multimodality and literacy in the new media age.* C. M. L. Ho, K. T. Anderson and A. P. Leong (eds.), (2011). London: Continuum. ISBN 9781441123916, 272 pages.

Over the past 20 years, we have witnessed unprecedented development of digital technologies; for example, personal computers, Internet, and smart phones are transforming the way we communicate with others. Given that effective communication is one of the ultimate goals of language learning, those working in the educational field should consider how to accommodate this change. In this respect, the edited volume, *Transforming Literacies and Language: Multimodality and Literacy in the New Media Age* is a timely publication as it aims to demonstrate the transformative role that digital technologies may play in five areas of educational research. The book's division into five parts reflects those different areas: pedagogical design, language's role in communication, classroom interaction, language input, and learners' identities as authors. Due to its wide-ranging and comprehensive nature, readers may notice that the impact of information and communication technology on language teaching/learning is broader and deeper than they might have expected.

After the brief introduction outlining the purpose and the theme of the entire volume, Part I addresses the issue of developing curriculum and tasks in a way that helps students to develop new sets of skills by engaging in authentic tasks using multimodal representation. Zammit (Chapter 1) provides an innovative curricular framework as a model that exposes students to a range of technologies and literate practices including searching information from new sources, critiquing texts, and creating products in various modes. On the other hand, De Souza and Towndrow (Chapter 2) propose a theory-based systematic approach to task design called Task Designers' Mixing Desk composed of five scales: choice of task, media and tool use, outcomes, strategies, and learning. Teachers less familiar with digital technologies and multiliteracies approach would highly benefit from Part I as both chapters are grounded in empirical evidence, not only demonstrating how the suggested models are realized in actual lessons but also illustrating what kinds of problems the teachers encountered and how they dealt with them.

Moving from pedagogical issues to the changing view of language's role in communication, Part II pays explicit attention to the transforming notion of literacy itself. Although Malinowski and Nelson (Chapter 3) acknowledge the centrality of language in human communication due to its predictable and arbitrary nature in meaning making, they keep a distance from the traditional thinking of literacy solely as linguistic communication (Jewitt, 2008). They discuss how language may interact with other modes of representation, sometimes increasing and other times decreasing or redistributing the meaning making potential of others. Meanwhile, Guo, Amasha, and Tan (Chapter 4) show a framework for the analysis of multimodal texts, which is followed by an example illustrating multimodal pedagogy. Due to its theoretical orientation, this part may seem less practical than others but still deserves equal attention since it gives valid grounds for the necessity of transformations occurring in the field of education as well as showing the forms of literacy we have to achieve, which may constitute the ultimate goal of language learning/teaching. Also, considering that this part lays the foundation for other chapters, it might have been better to place it at the beginning of the book, right after the introduction.

The next chapter discusses the contribution of online academic interaction to students' active participation and development of argumentation skills. Sivell (Chapter 5) argues that computer supported online interaction redistributes classroom discourse, thus transforming the teacher-student relationship. In a traditional classroom, students were considered only to respond to teachers' questions (e.g., Sinclair & Brazil, 1982). In online interaction, however, they also initiate a turn as well as provide a follow-up or evaluation relevant to what teachers and classmates say. On the other hand, Chapters 6 and 7 show that computer-supported collaboration helps learners to develop argumentation structures. All three chapters in Part III undoubtedly show that the technology-mediated lesson has generated positive effects from the pedagogical point of view. It remains unclear, however, how more active participation or enhanced critical thinking ability relate to the development of new literacy, which constitutes the core notion throughout the entire volume, because those capacities were highly valued when it comes to the traditional sense of literacy as well.

The next two chapters turn to corpus data and discuss their use from the pedagogical perspective. It goes without saying that Part IV brings to light the practicality of this book. Researchers have thus far identified new language patterns by analyzing a large amount of authentic data, based on which they discussed their pedagogical implications (e.g., Bloch, 2010). As Oakey (Chapter 9) pointed out, however, the researchers did so as a mere formality, only stating that teachers should incorporate such findings into their teaching, yet they did not provide specific guidelines on how to do so. In order to fill this gap, Oakey provides very detailed corpus-based instructional materials and discusses how they can fit into the existing EAP syllabus. In addition, Doyle (Chapter 8) points out the limitations of corpus data for educational use and suggests that their visual representation should be enhanced, especially for younger learners.

Finally, Part V discusses the use of Web 2.0 and mobile devices in language education and their contribution to promoting the participatory dimension of literacy. Blackstone and Wilkinson (Chapter 10) justify the use of blogs in both EAP and teacher training courses arguing that it enables students to interact with people beyond the classroom. According to Tan (Chapter 11), Wikis also transform the role

of the learner from a passive reader to an active writer. With respect to text messaging, Tagg (Chapter 12) views it as a useful resource for teaching creativity in everyday language rather than focusing on its negative impact on spelling and grammar. One notable characteristic in this part is the authors' careful attitude towards digital technologies and their warning against using the new media in classrooms simply for the sake of using them. For example, Tan makes it clear that even if using Wikis (where anyone can edit anything) helps learners to write in a way that is recognized by others as relevant and appropriate, thus promoting social literacy, it is not ideal for practising particular types of writing such as book reviews, which highly value individual judgment over collective thoughts.

Addressing a wide range of issues from language's role in communication to pedagogical design is certainly one of the strengths of this collection, but the multifaceted nature undermines the coherence of the entire volume at the same time. Even though the editors claim that each part speaks to the theme of transformation in distinct yet inter-related ways, thus providing complementary views, readers may not immediately notice the interconnectedness of various issues in different parts. This is first because each chapter does not make any reference to other chapters and second because different authors approach the concept of new literacy with different viewpoints. Guo, Amasha, and Tan define new literacy as multimodality whereas Tan and Tan view it as critical thinking ability, and Tan as social literacy. These heterogeneous definitions, however, are neither bad nor wrong considering that there are multiple literacies depending on specific contents, contexts, and communicative purposes (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1984) and that each definition of new literacy increases expectations of what it means to be literate according to the sociocultural perspective (Perez, 2004). Therefore, it would have been of much help to the reader if this volume had provided some explanations at the beginning with regard to what new literacy can mean and made it clear that different researchers may define it differently depending on their research contexts and the needs of target students. In that way, it could have not only reduced possible confusions for those unfamiliar with the transforming concept of literacy but also enhanced consistency across the entire volume.

Despite the aforementioned drawback, however, this collection is expected to entice various groups of readers. It is a useful volume for researchers in the field of applied linguistics especially pertinent to technology as it covers the broad impact of digital technologies on language education. Furthermore, this book may be a good resource for teachers at the chalkface not only because each chapter proposes models for consideration that are rooted in both theory and practice but also because the authors provide authentic evidence based on their own experience. Finally, students at both undergraduate and graduate levels would highly benefit from this volume since it provides at least snapshots of what is going on in the field due to the changes in the new media age. Given its timely publication and usefulness for a range of readers, this book is a worthwhile contribution to the ongoing discussion in the field.

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**References**

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