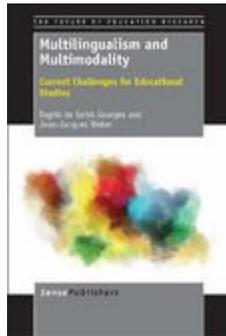


Professional Book Review

de Saint-Georges, I. and Weber, J. (Eds.) (2013). *Multilingualism and Multimodality: Current Challenges for Educational Studies*. Rotterdam, NL: Sense Publishers. 212 pp., ISBN: 978-94-6209-264-8, US \$54.00 (paperback).

Reviewed by Jessie Curtis, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.



This volume explores research in language education in the social context of unprecedented mobility of people and access to information, characterized as *superdiversity* (Vertovec, 2007). The book's central argument, elaborated in two parts, is that participation in multiple language communities and modalities requires reconsideration of the meanings of learning, teaching, interpreting and assessing language (p. 2). In Part One, *Multilingualism: Concepts, Practices and Policies*, researchers expand dimensions of language knowledge and multilingualism. Part Two, *Multimodality: Concepts, Practices and Consequences*, examines the ways in which modes of communication shape interactions in educational spaces and change what “learning” looks like. The volume, the second in a series of three, constitutes a critical reflection on language and learning in an era of accelerated mobility and access to information in contemporary Western Europe and on experiences that contrast with national and pan-European drives for standardization and uniformity.

In the first chapter, Jan Blommaert and Ad Backus examine what it means to know a language. Drives toward standardization in modern nation-states stand in contrast with contemporary experience of language in the context of *superdiversity*, a term which denotes post-1991 mobility of people and communications. “People can no longer be straightforwardly associated with particular groups and identities; their meaning-making practices can no longer be presumed to ‘belong’ to particular languages and cultures” (Vertovec, 2007, p. 13). These insights allow for re-conceptualizations of language repertoire and competence.

The authors propose *patterns of language knowledge* and *language biography* in order to make sense of language learning over a lifetime. “Actual knowledge of language, like any aspect of human development, is dependent on biography...and can be compared to the size of shoes. Shoes that fit perfectly at the age of twelve do not fit anymore at the age of thirty” (p. 15). The authors make an important contribution by creating a vocabulary to articulate and implement language patterns and biography in language learning and teaching. For example, language “acquisition,” which suggests “an enduring outcome,” is replaced with language “learning” as a more accurate descriptor for dynamic choices (p. 14). And, language repertoire can be viewed as a collection of resources and competences employed as needed to communicate in diverse social spaces.

Chapters Two and Three consider social meanings of language. Luisa Martín Rojo examines interactions in a Spanish-as-a-second-language class in Madrid, Spain. Drawing on Bourdieu's notion of capital, the author focuses on Arabic-speaking participants' negotiations to legitimate their linguistic capital. Their negotiation makes visible the cultural competence of the participants who have had experiences in language markets where their resources are valued. Martín Rojo finds that in the context of a national policy of assimilation these interactions challenge the "ideal" of a homogeneous, Spanish-speaking society, and the author demonstrates how a teacher invokes language ideology to control the classroom. In Chapter Three, analysis of a stretch of talk between teachers and students in a heritage language school in Birmingham, England, reveals that the actors appropriate language from multiple sources to signal values, world views, and identities. The authors, Blackledge, Creese, and Kaur Takhi, propose that Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia offers potential to expand the concept of multilingualism so as to develop language pedagogy grounded in communication patterns, with social meaning as the starting point. Their analysis of classroom talk foregrounds the students' practice of *re-voicing* to establish social identities. These chapters illustrate the potential for harnessing social meaning in language teaching practice. .

In the next two chapters, the authors examine conceptualizations of multilingualism in European institutions. Ruth Wodak finds that in everyday practices, such as meetings, European Union bureaucrats internalize multilingualism as a symbol of their European identity. At the same time, Wodak discovers an orientation to institutionalized multilingualism that privileges a small set of European languages. Weber and Horner's chapter brings our attention to multilingualism's clash with language as a product of nation-building (p. 103). This study finds that in two universities, one in Luxembourg and one in Finland, "internationalization" means adding English as a medium of instruction (p. 109). These actions stir national debates about loss of language and culture, debates that barely disguise anti-immigrant sentiment. As one Luxembourger argues, "One can use a few languages, but everybody has only one 'mother tongue'" (p. 105). These studies illustrate political, institutional, and popular challenges to multilingualism as a social norm.

The second part of the volume, *Multimodality: Concepts, Practices and Consequences*, considers the impact of communication technology on educational spaces. Gunther Kress argues that technology, in combination with a market-based orientation to education, has foregrounded social relations in environments where learning and teaching occur such that there is a need for a social semiotic theory of learning that would "develop a reliable *means of recognition* of pedagogic-semiotic work" (p. 121) grounded in multimodal communication, Kress emphasizes "recognition" as the need to make learning visible, in contrast to current metrics of success and failure that, he argues, lead to massive waste and the misrepresentation of learning and teaching. In the following chapter, Carey Jewitt compares technologies used in a UK English classroom over a 10-year time span. In 2000, the classroom has an overhead projector; 10 years later, an interactive whiteboard. In addition to technology's influence on social relations between students and teachers, Jewitt finds that technology has

changed students' experiences with text. In comparison to its stolid ancestor presented in full on the overhead projector 10 years earlier, an excerpt from a poem presented in 2010 is a transitory projection that is integrated with imagery. Jewitt asks educators to consider not only what is being presented but how students interpret representations that are multi-modal. The chapters by Kress and Jewitt together emphasize that learning in multimodal environments increasingly takes the form of interpretation.

Filliettaz, Losa and Duc explore discourse in vocational training. This is an important contribution. Vocational training has been examined extensively from an individual, cognitive standpoint, with a view toward efficiency; there is less research that documents participants' discourse practices in these settings. Through an analysis of video recordings of interactions with trainers and workmates, the authors illustrate how apprentices from diverse backgrounds “use specific discursive devices in order to act as legitimate participants” (p. 154) with varying degrees of success. The researchers observe that this research contributes to understanding today's high dropout rates in vocational training.

A chapter by Ron Scollon concludes the volume. Scollon employs the metaphor of “geography” to reflect on language as action that produces outcomes across space and time. Diversity and mobility, the context for this book, can appear to denote fragmentation, and it is easy to be distracted from the fact that language happens between people and links individual and collective histories. Scollon's chapter underscores these connections. Educators and researchers need to understand the global-ness of the drive toward standardization in language policy and to effectively articulate new frameworks for language education in our diverse and connected futures. *Multilingualism and Multimodality* does not claim to offer solutions. Instead, it informs us about language use in the present and offers educators ways to imagine language education that is consistent with contemporary, everyday experiences of multilingualism and interculturality in developed nation-states. The volume is a valuable resource for language education professionals who advocate for social, economic and linguistic equality.

References

- Vertovec, S. (2007). Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30, 1024–1054.