

## BOOK REVIEW

*From Face to Screen: Interactive Multimodal Semiotics at Work*, by Jyh Wee Sew.  
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Advancements in technology have opened up new resources for communication and the affordances of new media have also been harnessed for the benefit of education. To this end, *From Face to Screen: Interactive Multimodal Semiotics at Work* is an interesting and credible effort by Sew to illustrate how language and culture interacts in an educational context. Adopting the perspective of multimodal semiotics and a Vygotskyan view of learning as social development, he guides the reader through the semiotic discourse of face-to-face social interaction before focusing his discussion on the Malay language and the educational setting of a university in Singapore. He argues for the "relevance of multimodality in attaining language proficiency with the aid of web-based language literacy as a learning scaffold" (p. 4).

The author's main intentions are to stress the importance of cultural intelligence (CQ) and cultural linguistic elements in social discourse and to bring them into the light of foreign language teaching pedagogy. His strategy is to explore the factors that lead to productive social interactions in both offline and online contexts, interspersing his discussion with data from his studies on the use of Malay as a foreign language among his tertiary level students.

*From Face to Screen* is divided into seven chapters. Generally, the author's discussion flows from face-to-face social interactions to computer-mediated interactions interwoven with discussions on Malay language teaching pedagogy. Chapter 1 introduces the key ideas of the book namely the importance of knowledge of cultural semiotics in successful social interaction and suggests that "a command of cultural-semiotics is equally as significant as the mastery of syntax and morphology" (p. 7). Sew also stresses the need for language teachers to meet the expectations of learners today and to include engaging e-learning strategies

that exploit "immaterial yet fun content" in Web 2.0. This, he aptly terms "strategic pedagogy" (p. 8), and then proceeds to cite e-learning examples in the teaching of Thai, Korean and Malay as foreign languages at the National University of Singapore. The term "prod-using" (p. 12) is also introduced and defined as any produce and use process by the language learners to complete a task in a digital context.

Chapter 2 focuses on CQ and its importance in corporate and social interaction. Sew goes to great length to highlight the significance of CQ by citing examples of both verbal and non-verbal aspects of cultural semiotic variations in European and Asian communities. He moves on to describe in greater detail the Malay languaculture covering cultural semiotic elements such as Malay proverbs, indirectness in speech, marriage discourse, use of the right and left hands and eating odd number dates on breaking of fast. Despite providing interesting insight into the various speech cultures, this chapter deals with face-to-face interaction and leaves the reader with a sense of wondering when the latter half of the book title, *From Face to Screen*, will be addressed.

In Chapter 3, Sew develops on CQ and Malay language education in Singapore. Following Early, Ang and Tan (2006) who stated that CQ includes three major components – cultural strategic thinking, motivation and behaviour, Sew cleverly situates his Malay language pedagogical discussion on the component of behaviour. He argues for the use of ICT and a CQ-based pedagogy to revitalise Malay language education and illustrates with examples of teaching Malay as a foreign language using weblogs and video clips.

In Chapter 4, the discussion returns to a non-digital teaching strategy – dramatics and its pedagogical benefits. The author discusses in great detail how dramatics was implemented as a teaching strategy in Singapore in the spirit of "teach less learn more" (p. 71), a catchphrase in education. One of the underlying principles of this teach less learn more concept is to provide enjoyable learning experiences to engage learners and consequently, achieve greater retention of learning (Burns and Köster, 2016). Teachers interested to employ dramatics in their classrooms would find this chapter useful as the sample activities are all clearly described.

Chapter 5 focuses on digitalising learning of the Malay language. Sew reintroduces the term "prod-using" in the context of learning Malay and explains prod-using Malay as the "participatory process" in which digital media is used to produce "linguistic content to acquire the mastery of the Malay language" (p. 91). His students' self-initiated blog posts were analysed to illustrate that e-learning is a non-linear process and requires e-scaffolding in the form of emails and face-to-face interactions. This chapter is also practice-oriented, with the author recommending the weblog for e-learning and providing a clear description of the procedure covering aspects of setting up of the task and assessment of learning.

In the following chapter Sew elaborates on his study of Malay prod-using in the learning of Malay among the students at his university. Employing a multimodal content analysis of his students' weblog entries, he concluded that "blogging Malay literacy at tertiary level allows language learners to reinterpret and represent topics close at heart in a blend of diverse visual-linguistic compositions" (p. 124). These youths constructed their digital selves using both verbal and non-verbal semiotic resources; comic strips, digital photo narrations, video clips and emoticons. Such exploitation of semiotic resources, according to Sew, foregrounds "a desire to share affective digital forms with others as a part of social interaction" (p. 124). At this point, it would seem that Sew is attempting to link identity construction to e-foreign language learning via weblogs. He appears to be arguing that "a digital self is conducive to e-learning" (p. 125) but does not make apparent the characteristics of this digital self except that it is multimodal in nature. Despite being an interesting chapter on multimodal analysis of the weblogs, it appears to veer a little from the original course he set for the book in the introductory Chapters 1 and 2 where the case for cultural intelligence was laid out for the reader. Instead multimodal intelligence is foregrounded and its relationship to cultural intelligence remains somewhat submerged.

This book concludes in Chapter 7 with the author reiterating his view that foreign language pedagogy should include the teaching of "good interactive stance in accordance with the cultural semiotics of a language" (p. 127). He highlights several pedagogical pointers for teachers wishing to take their learners to a digital e-learning platform such as framing of instructions and ends the discussion with feedback from his students on prod-using Malay.

The strength of this book lies in its rich data drawn from the author's Malay language classroom where Malay is taught as a foreign language. He uses the analysis of these data to illustrate his views on Malay languaculture and how it can be employed as a teaching and learning strategy. In this way, Sew offers both a sociolinguistic as well as a pedagogical perspective. From a pedagogical standpoint, he provides some guidelines for teachers who are interested to employ the weblog as a "learning tool-cum-interactive platform for language acquisition" (p. 98). According to Danesi (2010), mass communication technologies allow human beings to extend themselves cognitively and socially. Viewed from this perspective, Sew's ideas and recommendation of the use of multimodal e-learning platforms and the concept of "prod-using" in the teaching of foreign languages is relevant in today's multisemiotic digital world.

A slight weakness of this book, if worth mentioning, is its information flow. The title *From Face to Screen* sets up an expectation of a certain progression in its delivery of information from face-to-face to an online platform. Despite doing a good job of leading the reader progressively from the introduction of cultural intelligence and later bringing it into discussion with Malay pedagogy and

the incorporation of ICT in the first three chapters, the author takes a step back into the non-digital world to discuss dramatics in Chapter 4. Then it goes back to digital language learning in Chapters 5 and 6. Although the pedagogical benefits of dramatics are well justified, this break in progression disrupts its coherence and cohesion. The question that perhaps needs to be answered to smoothen out the rough edges is: how does performance-based learning in dramatics contribute to learning in the digital world?

In summary, this book provides useful knowledge for tertiary students, teachers of foreign languages such as Malay and scholars with an interest in multimodality in social interaction and ICT in education. It is engaging in its rich cultural linguistic data and Sew's ideas on cultural intelligence and e-learning pedagogy is a contribution to the teaching of Malay as a foreign language.

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