

○ **D. BARTON & C. LEE, *LANGUAGE ONLINE: INVESTIGATING DIGITAL TEXTS AND PRACTICES***

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As our lives move increasing online, a book that sets out how language and literacies are changing through the use of digital technologies is much needed. Written by two well-regarded academics, Barton and Lee, *Language online: Investigating digital texts and practices* is a welcome addition to a growing body of scholarship in educational and applied linguistics that charts our collective move to cyberspace. The book offers a wide-survey of a range of topics, and is suitable as an undergraduate textbook, as part of a wider set of readings for a Master degree course, or as a general overview for academics new to this area.

The book consists of a preface and 13 chapters. In the first chapter, the authors scope and define key terms used in studies of online language. They identify three key directions in linguistics that have spurred an interest in computer-mediated communication: interest in the changing structural features of language, social variation across diverse online spaces, and work to do with language ideologies and metalanguage. Given the rise in social theories of language, Barton and Lee stress the need to combine textual analyses and practices in any study of online interaction.

Chapter 2 is brief, but it is perhaps the most powerful one in the book. Here, the authors argue that contemporary applied linguists need to increasingly turn their attention to language online, digital texts, and new literacies practices. The world, Barton and Lee remind us, is ever more textually mediated as people draw upon multiple semiotic resources to invent fresh relations amongst languages and other modes of meaning. In a sense, Chapter 2 serves to motivate and frame areas of interest to applied linguists when encountering language online.

In Chapter 3, the focus turns to building a conceptual framework to inform views of what occurs when acting and interacting online. For Barton and Lee, the concept of *practice* is core and provides the frame 'to locate a theory of language in a theory of life' (p.25), thus linking socio-cultural theory research with work in literacies. The concept of practice, or what people actually do with texts as they go about making sense of the world, underpins the rest of the book. Such a framing is further informed by concepts that include textual mediation, affordances, multimodality, and group affinities. Careful scholarship in this

chapter establishes the foundation for understanding how language online can be situated in the complex landscape of emerging theories.

Having set out concepts in the first three chapters, the authors use the remainder of the book to examine practices in a range of social spaces. Chapter 4 explores the ways in which diverse learners deploy their linguistic resources as they move across and within languages. Briefly, the authors urge us to move beyond notions of linguistic imperialism or pluralism to shift greater attention to actual language and literacy practices amongst people online. To illustrate their point, they describe multilingual practices that take place in a popular photo-sharing site, *Flickr*.

In Chapter 5, Barton and Lee deepen their analyses of language online through their examination of the concept of affordances, or what practices users enact within the options and constraints of available technologies. Once again, *Flickr* provides a rich environment for research for multilingual actions.

Clustered into a central theme, Chapters 6, 7, and 8 each provide illustrations of how identities are practiced online. Specifically, Chapter 6 examines how the online self emerges through writing in socially mediated spaces. In Chapter 7, the focus turns to the concept of stance, or how attitudes and opinions are developed amongst online participants, through two case studies in particular. Chapter 8 illustrates the ways in which language online is discussed amongst users with attention to self-perceived poor uses of English. Together, the three chapters show how careful research that is informed by solid concepts can illuminate an understanding of the practices and texts of language online.

The next three chapters in the book revolve around language learning. In Chapter 9, Barton and Lee show how 'everyday practices' online can foster language learning. Through their online interactions, people learned how to use the available technologies and sharpen appropriate skills. Accordingly, the authors argue that people learn best through participating in practices, drawing on others as resources, reflecting on their work, and taking on new identities. Chapter 10 examines the vernacular, or everyday, literacies of online practices against an understanding of globalisation. Finishing the theme of learning, Chapter 11 discusses the implications of language online in the language classroom, noting how an awareness of digital texts and practices can shift teacher perceptions and pedagogies.

In the final two chapters, Barton and Lee discuss approaches to online language research and suggest areas for further development. Importantly, they note how differences between 'on-' and 'offline' worlds are disappearing as language flows across social spaces and fluid environments.

Overall, the book provides a solid introduction to the study of digital texts and practices. The work is comprehensive and diverse which, ironically, is both its strength and weakness. On the one hand, the strength of the book lies in its wide coverage of complex topics and issues;

BOOK REVIEWS

on the other hand, it suffers from the lack of depth in examining areas such as new literacies, computer-mediated discourse analysis, or blended language learning. The authors are well aware of such a shortcoming, and acknowledge how the fast moving and expanding area of research makes it difficult to keep pace. Criticism aside, I believe this book provides a solid introduction to the role of language, and how it is enacted, in digital media and online interactions. The book could be readily adopted as a core text in an undergraduate subject, or be used within a mix of other readings in a Masters course of applied linguistics. Scholars in applied linguistics would benefit from reading it, too, as it provides a comprehensive overview of areas that could be mined for extended research and study.