
Tyler Glodjo  
*Indiana University of Pennsylvania*

New media sociolinguistics, the study of the everyday, banal ways in which mediated and situated language practices construct meaning and position individuals within digital interactional contexts, is constantly in flux as new technologies emerge perpetually. This edited volume seeks to update the field while adhering to Herring’s (2004) admonition that “researchers would do well to take a step back from the parade of passing technologies and consider more deeply the question of what determines the people’s use of mediated communication” (p. 34). The editors offer four organizing principles that they argue should define research in new media sociolinguistics: discourse, technology, multimodality, and ideology. These principles ground the research in *Digital Discourse* as each study privileges everyday language in use, technology as a means for mediating such language practices (as opposed to fetishizing the technology itself), the spatialized and heteroglossic nature of digitally mediated communication, and how digital discourse manifests beliefs and hierarchies of knowledge regarding language use. While new media scholarship has been critiqued for the dominance of English as the language of study and
publication, one particular strength of this volume is its intentional collection of research engaging a variety of languages, including Irish, Hebrew, Chinese, Finnish, Japanese, German, Greek, Arabic, French, as well as English. The volume is divided into five parts, each consisting of three chapters, centered on key concepts from sociolinguistics and discourse studies: discourse, style, genre, stance, and methodology. While each study certainly intersects and draws on more than one of these constructs, this organizational structure foregrounds the primary analytical concepts and facilitates a strand of dialog across each chapter.

Part 1 looks at the metadiscursive framings of new media language by how it is represented and reflexively considered across contexts. Squire opens this section with a heteroglossic analysis of media reports on a high-profile extramarital affair in Detroit politics. In particular, she looks at the ideological underpinnings of news corporations recasting adult text messages as “standardized,” both in their visual reproduction and oral reporting, and thus aligning “with ideologies that stigmatize youth speech as novel in comparison with adult speech” (p. 23). Jones, Schieffelin, and Smith look at the intertextual discourse of young people using instant messaging and public Facebook posts, in particular their metasemiotic co-construction of gossip. Lenihan concludes the section by looking at the production and policing of language among a community of Irish-language Facebook translators, and the politicized nature of Facebook, Inc. capitalizing on unpaid translation work. This opening section serves to emphasize the role of language ideologies in digitally-mediated discourse, especially regarding language as “under constant surveillance and invariably deployed as resource (or excuse) for social judgment and control” (p. xxxi).
Part 2 shifts to consider creative play and resistance with generic form, and the inherent hybridity embedded in multimodal interaction. Spilioti looks at how Greek teens draw on the historicity of relationships and frequency of daily interactions to construct closings in their text messages. Nishimura studies the explosive growth of *keitai* (“mobile phone”) novels in Japan, employing a corpus-stylistics research approach to explore the tensions between literacy ideologies and those of literary merit. She refutes common assumptions of this new genre as “illiterate” or a “dumbing down” of the Japanese language. In the final chapter of this section, Lee performs an online discourse ethnography of Cantonese-English bilinguals microblogging on Facebook, concluding that “status updates are hardly one coherent written genre, but a hybrid of genre features identified in different text types” (p. 123).

Part 3 explores the way “users capitalize on the semiotic affordances of digital technologies” (p. xxxiii) in their style and stylization. This was a particularly standout section in this edited volume due to its ethnographic studies of digital communities seldom discussed in new media communication. Newon offers a participant observation and analysis of an online community in the massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) *World of Warcraft*. She explores players’ simultaneous use of spoken, written, and visual discourse “to perform identities informed by status and expert roles” (p. 151) and maintain group coherence through shared competition. Peuronen performs an ethnography of Christian extreme sports enthusiasts in a Finnish online discussion forum, exploring emergent translocality through heteroglossic discourse. The novelty of Peruonen’s piece, however, is not in her analysis of English- and Finnish-language practices in the forum, but the globalized discourses of extreme sports and Christianity on which they draw, and the seamless transitions between globalized and
localized practices. Vaisman studies the blogs of 140 Israeli teenage girls as belonging to a community of bloggers known as Fakatsa (“girly girls”). These bloggers perform orthographic play by substituting Hebrew characters with Roman English script for the aesthetic and visual purpose of performing “their ‘glocalized’ feminine identities,” and thus “(re)negotiating their stereotype as shallow, vain fashion victims” (p. 192).

The chapters in Part 4 foreground the ways in which communicators position themselves and others through digital discourse, and thus explore the ideologies that inform such stancetaking. Walton and Jaffe study the racialized and class-based stances of the creator/author and commenters of the blog Stuff White People Like, exploring the tension between authorial control and co-constructed stancetaking on a blog, and the ideological implications therein. Thurlow and Jaworski explore the multimodal stancetaking of tourists on the photo-sharing site Flickr, and how these practices manifest an ideology they name “banal globalization.” Last in this section, Chun and Walters analyze YouTube videos of a stand-up comedy routine by a fluent Arabic speaker of Korean and Vietnamese descent. The stancetaking of the performance, as well as those found in the YouTube comments section, reveal that “YouTube may be a space that inherently Orientalizes difference” (p. 270) even as it challenges particular forms of Orientalism.

The final section of Digital Discourse is a particularly insightful conclusion to the book in that each chapter emphasizes methodological challenges and emerging practices for the field of new media studies. Androutsopoulos makes the case for digital heteroglossia as a way to move away from a narrow view of linguistic difference in order to analyze holistically “the multi-authorship, translocality, multimodality, and ‘modularity’ of more recent new media” (p. xxxvi). Dürscheid and Stark reveal the importance of a quantitative analysis in new media discourse
studies through their corpus-based study of text messaging in Switzerland. This chapter also highlights logistic and ethical tensions in the large-scale collection of text messaging data, as well as the need for open access to such a large corpus for academic study. The book concludes with Jones’ chapter on video footage of skateboarders in Hong Kong. Jones employs the analytic concept of “bodies without organs” to explore the evidentiary, retrospective, surrogate, and anticipatory functions of skater videos “to string together their successes into idealized portrayals that reveal not only their past glory but also their future potential” (p. 333). Jones’ chapter draws on the emergence of technologies to complicate distinctions between language and other modalities, revealing new media research’s preference for analytic convenience.

This edited volume offers significant contributions to the field of new media sociolinguistics. Without fetishizing any form of “new” technology, the editors compile a breadth of research on a myriad of digitally mediated language practices in order to explore the role technology plays in everyday language use. Despite the strengths of these chapters, though, there are several realities left unaddressed that future research in the field will hopefully engage. First, the editors of this collection are very intentional in hedging the privilege inherent in new media studies. They say, “the fact remains that so-called global flows of wealth, information, and technology are also marked by stoppages, blockages, trickles, and any number of non flow metaphors. The opportunities of new media may span the globe, but they certainly do not cover it, nor do they span it in equal measure” (p. xxviii). Despite this commentary on inequitable access and control of technology, none of the chapters here extend, problematize, or critique this reality. As mentioned above, Digital Discourse entails a significant contribution to the field with its research topics spanning a variety of languages. This multilingual perspective, however,
remains silent on, and fails to critically engage, the role of English as a global language. This is particularly evident in the studies reviewed above that analyze switches and meshes between English and other languages like Finnish, Hebrew, and Cantonese. Lastly, though the editors include a section on methodology, the research presented in this volume privileges online discourse ethnography to the extent that such an approach may appear as the only legitimate method of digital discourse analysis. Dürscheid and Stark’s chapter highlight the potential of corpus-based linguistics and quantitative analysis in the field, but very few alternative methods are represented or discussed. These shortcomings do not detract from the significance this volume brings to the field; rather, they reveal the complexity of new media sociolinguistics and the potential for future researchers to continue engaging emerging phenomena of digitally mediated communication through the lenses of discourse, technology, multimodality, and ideology.
Reference