



## **Review of *Second-language discourse in the digital world: Linguistic and social practices in and beyond the networked classroom***

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### **Second-language discourse in the digital world: Linguistic and social practices in and beyond the networked classroom**

Vandergriff, I.

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### **Review**

*Second-language discourse in the digital world* presents a comprehensive account of what multilingual users and L2 learners do with language and other semiotic resources in computer mediated discourse (CMD) through detailed analysis of data from a wide range of languages and virtual spaces including language learning websites, social networking sites, and networked classrooms. Following an introductory chapter outlining the scope of CMD, the book contains four distinct sections that, together, define web 2.0 and CMD (Section I), illuminate digital practices (Section II), describe linguistic and semiotic resources and their role in identity formation and relationship maintenance (Section III), and discuss social practices in digital spaces (Section IV) through a view of language and discourse that accounts for broad social contexts.

In Chapter 1, *Computer-mediated discourse*, Vandergriff positions her agenda through terminological definitions, and introduces features of CMD, a concept distinct from computer-mediated communication (CMC). The former highlights the discourse produced in digital spaces, while the latter focuses on processes of communication. The chapter features an overview of contemporary social practices unique to the Internet, and discusses theoretical issues related to tools and genres. Tools have affordances and constraints, which result in adaptive practices by users in service of communicative needs that depend on relationships, purposes, and contexts. The intentional use of the terms multilingual and bilingual is explained—the former focus on sociolinguistic and contextual factors, while *L2 speaker* emphasizes an individual's ability to acquire and use additional languages.

Section I builds on this conceptual overview with two additional chapters: *The social web and the social turn* (Chapter 2) and *Analyzing computer-mediated discourse* (Chapter 3). In Chapter 2, Vandergriff situates her work within socio-constructivist and situated learning paradigms interested in holistic contexts of discourse. She describes the web as a participatory social space that facilitates broad authorship of digital, multimodal texts connecting users with one another, and highlights the alignment between web 2.0 practices

and the social turn in SLA—where learning occurs through collaboration, cognition is distributed, and knowledge is co-constructed in interactions. After discussion of traditional and contemporary uses of technology in language teaching, Vandergriff argues that CMD offers greater autonomy over conversations and greater agency in textual productions as learners control, publish, and share knowledge compared to typical teacher-controlled, classroom-based discourse sequences.

Chapter 3 synthesizes three decades of CMC research from structural CALL (human–computer interactions) to communicative CALL (human–human interactions within digitally mediated spaces), including research on negotiation of meaning within text-chat environments, and telecollaboration. Vandergriff describes her agenda in adopting Herring’s (2007) model of computer-mediated discourse analysis which accounts for medium (technological) and situation (social) factors. Digital spaces afford a range of new multilingual and semiotic practices, including the selective use of resources like graphics, images, *like* buttons, and hashtags to perform identities. She notes that multilingual practices (e.g., heteroglossia, codeswitching, and translanguaging) in CMD have made code switching more acceptable in L2 use in contrast with traditionally monolingual FL classrooms.

Section II, *Digital practices and language learning*, contains three chapters that demonstrate L2 use in particular digital discourse communities, including dedicated language learning websites and open web 2.0 spaces such as blogs, wikis, and fanfiction sites. Chapter 4, *Networked communities*, takes up various conceptions of community, including Wenger’s (1998) communities of practice (CoP) and Gee’s (2005) affinity spaces, and describes how users orient to online communities through representational practices. In the CoP framework, membership is negotiated as learners move from periphery to full membership through processes of socialization as they develop shared repertoires and align with group norms. By contrast, affinity spaces are fluid, assumed power differentials between novices and experts are absent, and linguistic diversity is encouraged. All communities involve shared interest (e.g., the L2 itself in language learning websites or photography on Flickr) whereby membership is legitimated as users successfully navigate community norms. Because of global flows of data and information, virtual communities are characterized by multilingualism and multimodality, which can expand semiotic resources and compensate for shortcomings in linguistic resources. Social media sites like Reddit, Facebook, Livemocha, and Deutsch lernen are discussed, with their respective norms of interaction and ways in which collective community identities are established. Finally, Herring’s (2004) notion of online communities is presented as an apt framework for analyzing social interactions and groups in CMD.

Chapter 5, *Digital genres*, combines a conceptual overview of genre with descriptions of gaming, online news reviews, YouTube videos, and language learning websites. Digital genres have communicative purpose, moves, and rhetorical strategies (Swales, 1990) and are dynamic texts that can be linked and unlinked with other texts, resulting in complex intertextual practices. Particular genres and their affordances include wikis (collaborative writing), blogs (connective writing through links to other web content and with others through comments), fanfiction (creative and playful writing), social network sites (self-presentation and community participation), mobile-assisted language learning (mobility), chat (argumentation, dissent, criticism, etc.), and virtual worlds (multimodal and embodied interaction). Together, these tools promote agency, identity development, and multiliteracies through creative use of non-linguistic semiotic resources.

Chapter 6, *Language learner agency*, demonstrates how digital practices and genres encourage more choice and control over discursive spaces than do traditional L2 classrooms. It outlines theoretical work on agency and identity: for example, Norton’s (2000) concept of investment; van Lier’s (2008) notions of initiative, control, autonomy, and motivation; and the notion of language learning as self-translation (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). It distinguishes between expressing agency (e.g., comparing the actual L2 learning self with an idealized L2 self) and exercising agency (e.g., choosing particular tools, seeking out partners, modifying learning activities). Agency can be exercised by using humor, using the L1 to build rapport, adopting a teacher stance in informal learning spaces, and using the community for metalinguistic questions. Vandergriff aptly notes, however, that some digital tools limit agency in their positioning of users through text, layout, and visuals.

Section III, *Linguistic and other semiotic resources of networked L2 use*, addresses semiotic choices involved in development of messages (content) and meta-messages (how content is expressed). It also focuses on the role of semiotic choices in indexing speaker identity, developing social presence, and maintaining relationships. Chapter 7, *Indexing the L2 self*, illustrates how L2 voice is developed in CMD. Multiple aspects of identities can be indexed overtly through labels, by expressing an opinion, or through forms of discourse associated with particular groups, content clues, or images. Mitigating face threats are important to indexing the L2 self and can occur through linguistic practices such as apologizing for errors or overtly promoting one's expertise. Data presented include a Facebook user's presentation of three adjacent selfies to represent her Japanese, Korean, and English selves; a female Mandarin L1, English L2 learner's exclamation, *I'm a man*, to indicate her choice of a stereotypically male-dominated major; and L2 German learners in the Flickr group, "We speak German," who demonstrate affinities with Germany through their photo content.

Chapter 8, *Positioning the L2 self*, highlights genre and community norms that develop around particular tools, and the consequences for relationships of performing unconventional practices. Communities develop out of accumulations of stances, which can also include shifting the specific object of a stance to a more general topic to avoid a face threat (e.g., from discussing the Iraq War to speaking about war in general). Other signs and symbols used in relationship building include emoticons or "lexical surrogates" (e.g., *\*blushing\**, p. 134) to display affect, stretching words (e.g., *Hellooooo!*, p. 135) to imply intonation, or using multiple punctuation marks or ellipses to emphasize disagreement. Signs are recruited for their efficiency, and not all signs carry universally unique meanings, since emoticons vary across cultures.

Chapter 9, *Deploying multilingual resources*, demonstrates a range of multilingual practices, including side-by-side translations of same content (e.g., in a dual language travel blog), different content for different audiences, or intra-sentential code-switching where isolated lexical items are inserted into the matrix language that establishes morphosyntactic structure. Multilingual choices (e.g., multilingual hashtags or code-switching) may be determined by audience factors (e.g., choices made for symbolic effect or for indexing in-group identity) or by medium factors, (e.g., when multilingual Chinese and English users choose English for its compatibility with ASCII keyboards). While L2 classrooms typically discourage use of code-switching, CMD contexts afford and enhance this practice, which is a more intentional process than in face-to-face (FTF) communication. In some online language learning sites like Reddit, code-switching may involve reverting to the L1 to compensate for lower L2 proficiency.

The final section, *Social practices of networked L2 use*, discusses social practices of learners interacting in digital spaces. Chapter 10, *Negotiating for a supportive space*, demonstrates how users orient to language and to each other. Some sites prescribe netiquette rules such as by banning all caps and multiple punctuation marks (Deutsche Welle) or by specifying the code (e.g., Deutsch für Dich insisting that users write in German). On other sites (Deutsch lernen), users themselves might prescribe topic norms. Typical negotiation practices include seeking corrections or making self-deprecating remarks about one's linguistic proficiency. Contrary to Reddit or other CMD sites, telecollaborations and online language learning communities (e.g., Livemocha) are more tolerant of user errors than non-learning-oriented web spaces, where learners might be prompted by NS participants to switch to their L1 for greater mutual understanding. Thus, even in online spaces, learners do not always control the discourse space.

Chapter 11, *Grounding for intersubjectivity*, explores how medium and situation factors can affect grounding, or establishing "positive or negative evidence of understanding of each utterance produced" (p. 180). While the number of grounding strategies used in CMD does not differ from FTF communication, medium factors can affect particular strategies. For example, multiparty chat participants may employ more address terms than they would in FTF communication, where interlocutors are clearer. Grounding may be less efficient in multiparty chats where turns overlap, but facilitated in asynchronous discussion posts where threads clearly mark response pairs. Intersubjectivity can be established through stancetaking, but compromised through linguistic repair. Shared understanding also entails knowing and participating in conventions of joint action in CMD spaces, such as stancetaking in a language learning context.

Chapter 12, *Playing, joking, and amusing yourself and others*, presents forms of language play involved in performing the self, such as pragmatic play, re-mix, fanfiction, and hashtagging. Play can destabilize norms, foster language development through creative constructions, index social identity, facilitate rapport building, and define shared group identities. Play can involve the adoption of different accents, sociolects, or multilingual codes, the creative use of emoticons, the transformation of familiar online acronyms, or the display of emotion through multiple punctuation marks. Humor as play can be challenging, since understanding humor often relies on shared cultural meanings, and misunderstandings can be face-threatening.

Chapter 13, *Talking about language learning*, discusses three different ways learners manage the learning process: structuring learning, managing emotions, and attending to interactional strategies. L2 learners may rely on a community through reflective language learning blogs, by asking the community for advice in the process of learning, or by sharing resources with it. CMD spaces enable learners to form solidarity around difficult aspects of the L2, to ask questions about the L2, and to share affective reactions to particular words. Learners typically solicit each other's correction preferences and express feelings of imposing on L1 speakers.

The final brief chapter, *L2 CMD and language learning*, summarizes L2 users' primary activities in CMD spaces: talking about learning (e.g., emotions, processes, and strategies), using the L2, and talking about the L2 (forms and meanings). CMD spaces expand discourse worlds for L2 learners, foster agency, expand semiotic potentials through multilingual practice and multimodal resources, and afford connections and solidarity with other learners and speakers through metadiscourse about language. Although CMD opens up possibilities for learners to engage in authentic discourse practices of L2 communities, many learners use these spaces to talk about language instead. Native speakers tend to adopt the role of expert teacher, correcting language forms. Such practices perpetuate folk beliefs about language learning that accurate use of forms must be solidified prior to successful L2 communication.

By documenting and analyzing the way identity and relationships are constructed through intentional recruitment of signs and symbols that align with cultures-of-use of particular digital genres, Vandergriff efficiently supports her overarching arguments: (a) that online spaces can foster development of an agentive and autonomous L2 self in a way that traditional classrooms constrain, (b) that L2 and multilingual users have access to new semiotic resources in CMD spaces, and (c) that digital worlds afford opportunities for L2 users to connect with authentic discourse communities. The richness of Vandergriff's work lies in the ensemble of themes and perspectives on CMD, although chapters can also be appreciated individually. Readers interested in how web 2.0 practices both mirror and differ from FTF communication will find in this book a rich range of data drawn from a wide variety of languages and online discourse contexts. Practitioners interested in networking learners in CMD spaces will appreciate the accounts of L2 learner practices to inform expectations about learners' interactions within CMD. Overall, themes presented throughout the book wholly capture predominant areas of interest within applied linguistic perspectives on foreign language learning and are skillfully interwoven with clearly articulated, compelling analyses of CMD data. Students, teachers, and researchers of language use and learning in digital contexts will find in this book a rich collection of resources on which to draw.

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