

Book Review



Lee, C., (2017) *Multilingualism online*. New York: Routledge. 170 pages.

Scholarship in internet linguistics has had a long tradition since the work of Crystal (2001) at the beginning of the 21st century when areas of investigation such as the phenomenon of Netspeak, identity construction on the Internet and the language used in e-mails, chat groups and other online platforms were established. Some of these areas have been examined by various scholars, namely Androutsopoulos (2006) in his work on Computer-Mediated-Communication (CMC), Liu and Liu (2014) in their study of the word-formation of English Netspeak, Androutsopoulos (2015) in his research on Networked Multilingualism and Alonso-Belmonte and Vinagre (2017) in their paper on interculturality and identity in CMC that has carved current scholarship inquiry. Each has offered a contribution in the current work of Lee (2017) which marks the third wave of Internet linguistics and demonstrates the growing multilingual practices in the digital platform that resemble spoken communication.

In her current work, Lee (2017) presents the changing landscape of the Internet from being monolingual to multilingual. Although multilingualism is used to describe the phenomenon, its delineation is a long way from its sociolinguistic origin. Hence, her goal in this book is to shed light on multilingualism on the Internet by exploring complex online interactions. This is addressed in the eight chapters namely, background and approach to multilingualism online, linguistic diversity and language choice online, written code-switching online, multilingual practices and identities online, representations of multilingualism on the Internet, minority languages and the Internet, online translation as a multilingual practice and researching multilingualism online: current trends and future perspectives.

Lee commences her discussion of the first chapter by tracing her Internet experience since its inception in the 1990s that sets the background to the study. Through her autoethnography, it is notable how she, as an Internet user, observes her linguistic practices and addresses the technological affordance

changes which position the relationship of people and their multilingual practices which she notes “research into language on the internet and must take into account not only the texts on the screen but also what people do with these texts in other areas of their lives” (6). This sets the repackaging of multilingualism as used on the Internet as *multilingual practices*, defined as “a subset of literacy practices that involve people doing things with two or more languages” (Barton and Lee 2013: 44), which is anchored in the tradition of *literacy practice*.

From this working definition of multilingual practices, a discussion of the meaning-making resources that are available to online users is covered in the second and third chapters. The second chapter looks at the *linguascape* of the Internet which involves linguistic diversity and language choices. One major observation in the investigation of CMC is that the majority of language use is English which may pose a threat to small languages. Despite the predominance of English, several online users have been noted as using their local language which has slowly earned its visibility on the Internet due to its translocal interactions. Apart from local or smaller languages, other resources such as dialogue bubbles and emoticons are used. It is worth noting that such use is not due to any claims of universality but to the users’ practices and preferences. Another resource is code-switching, as discussed in Chapter three. Departing from its traditional definition, CS has a different function in online discourses which most theories and models available fail to account for. Some of these switches are seen in *Script-switching*—the alternation of orthographies. Lee proposes the move from structural-oriented investigations to a functional view in explaining CS as part of digital practices that involve the people context and social meanings. This chapter lays the foundation of CS scholarship in the concept of superdiversity and mobility.

Chapter four discusses how these multilingual practices and linguistic choices construct users’ online identities. Lee notes that the use of multilingual resources can construct different identities. The use of English and smaller languages in Flickr may present a global identity. Hashtag constructs an “ambient affiliation” that offers topic discussion and is considered authentic through the employment of multilingual and semiotic resources. Language play can produce humor. This is another way of mitigating the tone of the language and thus affecting one’s identity construction. One interesting use of multilingual practices is on the extension of academic engagement through social media where CS can build solidarity and lessen the distance between students and teachers.

The employment of various multilingual resources challenges and even breaks down the traditional notion of linguistic boundaries in the age of social

media and superdiversity. Chapter five sheds light on this position by looking at online platforms like Wikipedia, YouTube and online news. In these digital spaces, representations of multilingualism as in the incorporation of other languages, even the smaller languages in a logo may present a company's global identity and metalinguistic representations in comment sections on YouTube and online news may demonstrate self-depreciating and self-appreciating identities, authorities such as L1 speakers and even the imposition of correctness.

Chapter six presents the minority languages that are underrepresented on the Internet. These minority languages are being represented through various efforts that involve machine translation, language documentation and multilingual versions of websites. Some other ways are through the use of minority languages in commenting on and engaging in any discussion online that may offer new insights. However, despite such attempts, some are still less motivated to use it due to the pronounced dominance of English which is considered to be the lingua franca of the internet.

One notable development in online discourse is translation. Machine translation has dramatically grown over the years. In Chapter seven, the development of translation from a structural orientation to a corpus-based one which operates in collocation has been realized through google translate. The dichotomy between online and offline communication has been diminishing because of this advancement. However, Lee asserts that there are still several companies that continue to view languages as separate entities and approach one-language-at-a-time multilingualism. Despite this view, it cannot be denied that the direction of translation in the mobile world is becoming interdisciplinary.

Lastly, Chapter eight presents the current direction of research in multilingualism online. From describing Netspeak features and identifying variations, the research trajectory of multilingualism online works on the assumption that people are always on. This brings forth the third wave of Internet linguistics that centers on *discourse centered online ethnography* (DCOE) which "combines the systematic observation of selected sites of online discourse with direct contact with its social actors" (Androutsopoulos, 2008: 2). Another view that has been put forward is how social media has changed to become "a collocation of online spaces." This means the traditional asynchronous and synchronous dichotomy has been broken down.

To sum up, Lee's work on multilingualism online has successfully demonstrated how the digital platform has adapted to the changing landscape of everyday communication. It presents how various traditional notions have become obsolete in the ongoing developments of the Internet. Some of these are the grounds for multilingualism which has sprung from its monoglossic ideology

to a heteroglossic one. This has complemented the tradition of translanguaging where different linguistic and semiotic resources are maximized in the production of messages. It has also shown how the online world is becoming more and more similar to the offline world. This means facial reactions, prosodic features and movements have already been represented by emoticons, dialogue bubbles and even gifs. Furthermore, the depiction of everyday practices is becoming more evident on the Internet due to the co-existence of different modes and resources. Most importantly, the book discusses the significant shift to literary practices that may offer ways of understanding multilingualism as they happen in a naturally-occurring context and people's identity construction through their choices and practices.

In terms of readership, this book is recommended to all graduate students who are investigating multilingualism and computer-mediated communication as it delivers a simplistic presentation but critical discussion of the field. This can also be a good starting point for those people who are still new to the field of Internet linguistics due to its clear flow of theoretical and methodological developments. Teachers of English may also find this book insightful in offering them an explanation of how users manage their identity and description of the users' multilingual practices.

Finally, this book has come at the right time to jumpstart different research inquiries in the era of globalization and superdiversity.

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