



**Esther Odilia Breuer, Eva Lindgren, Anat Stavans,
Elke Van Steendam (Eds.) Multilingual literacy.
Multilingual Matters, Bristol, England (2021). 304 pp.
E-book: UK £39.95; US \$59.95; EU €54.95**

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This is an author-produced PDF of a book review accepted for publication in *Journal of Second Language Writing* following peer review. The full, definitive publisher-authenticated version can be found at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2022.100900>

The idea of multilingual literacy, for me, invokes images of migrant children learning to read and write in English, or possibly children in bilingual classrooms, dedicating equal time to literacy skills in two languages. Either way, it is a limited perspective. Reading this twelve-chapter edited volume entitled simply *Multilingual Literacy*, part of the Multilingual Matters series ‘New perspectives on language and education,’ I found that my understanding of the concept evolved. With notably helpful cross-referencing, I learned that there is quite a range of interpretations and definitions of the concept and related terms. I learned that multilingual literacy development is an endeavor not only in educational contexts, but outside them as well, for researchers, teachers, and learners alike. I learned that the influence of digital technologies has changed the way we approach multilingual literacy practices, leading us to new perspectives on affected identities and realities. I was particularly drawn to the way, in most chapters, the book provides a worthwhile extension of sociocultural literacy research, thus providing an effective update to the great work of Brian Street’s (1997) cross-cultural ‘new literacy studies.’

Opening with an editorial introduction chapter, the book is then divided into four parts. The first part comprises three chapters that explore some of the problems with multilingual literacy and approaches to dealing with those problems. Parts two and three focus on multilingual literacy frameworks contextualised by language classrooms. Part two’s three chapters consider wider social influences in classroom practices on multilingual learners, while the two chapters in part three target the influence of digital technologies on such learners. In part four, the book closes with four chapters that go beyond the classroom to explore non-formal multilingual literacy development in other spaces. The contributing authors are based in Europe, Israel, and the United States. English plays a role in all these contexts, whether as a first language (Ireland and the United States), as a de facto second language (Austria, France, Germany, Israel, Sweden), or third or fourth language (Belgium, Luxembourg). The kind of multilingualism in these contexts, often based on immigration, is what we find in much of the literature on multilingualism, which allows for the volume to engage with key discussions and take them in new directions. However, the authors also build sociocultural aspects of multilingualism into their chapters that provide effective discussions of several key areas.

The ability to read and write in more than one language is the basic understanding of ‘multilingual literacy,’ but as with so many other terms in the broad field of applied linguistics, it is open to interpretation. Although many global populations maintain certain multilingual competencies, these tend more toward speaking and listening. But there is increasing pressure to develop (and reward for those who have) ‘multilingual *multiliteracy*,’ given that communicative ability in multiple languages in both spoken and written modes is

on the rise. The opening chapter, an editorial introduction written by Breuer and Van Steendam, targets this development, providing an overview of some of the different definitions of the terms multilingualism and (multi-)literacy and establishing the focus of the book on literacy as a social practice. The discussion of definitions is picked up later in the book in Chapter 2 and Chapter 8. The sociocultural focus is evident throughout the book, but a helpful overview is outlined in Chapter 9.

Research issues are the focus of the chapters in part one. Certain ‘hot topics’ such as superdiversity and plurilingualism, among others, are dealt with critically by Donahue in Chapter 2, the author challenging these from a social justice perspective, and concluding with a call for more evidence in support of how to recognize ‘success factors’ in different diversity models of literacy. The concept of a third space, as raised by Kramsch (2009), is proposed as a lens for understanding new interpretations of success. I was so happy to read this, as someone who proposed the idea of a ‘comfortable’ third space for multilingual students in higher education (McKinley et al., 2019). I look forward to seeing responses to this call.

Discussions of micro-level multilingual literacy studies form Chapters 3 and 4, both with immigrants in European countries, and both with valuable methodological contributions and reflections. Budde and Prüsmann’s study of lower proficiency immigrant learners of German in Chapter 3 argues for the implementation of a pre-selection questionnaire, developed after careful observation and evaluation of the learners, for survey methods in multilingual literacy research to be effective. In Chapter 4, Norlund Shaswar raises the dilemma of interpreters acting as co-researchers in the context of an interview-based multilingual literacy study of an immigrant learner in Sweden. After a detailed account of the study and highlighting the need to situate literacy practices in context, the chapter concludes with the argument that interpreters need to be co-researchers. I was delighted, in my quest for innovative research methods, to read these two chapters, as they provide effective examples of alternative approaches based on need.

In part two, the first of two parts dedicated to chapters based in classroom contexts, Chapters 5-7 present studies in primary school contexts. In Chapter 5, proponents of a slightly different composite of complex dynamic systems theory (what the authors—Jessner, Malzer-Papp, and Allgäuer-Hackl—refer to as ‘dynamic systems and complexity theory’ with their own acronym – DSCT, here and in their other widely cited works) frame their chapter with Herdina and Jessner’s (2002) Dynamic Model of Multilingualism (DMM) to provide a new theoretical framework for multilingual literacy development composed of five building blocks. In Chapter 6, Machowska-Kosciak presents an ethnographic study of a Polish immigrant child in Ireland. With a focus on socialization and identity negotiation through literacy practices, the study reveals significant insights for emotional (dis-)continuities for such learners who ultimately learn to work with two identities. In Chapter 7, Wedin places co-constructed identity at the forefront, which especially piqued my interest as a social constructivist myself. In this action research conducted with year five multilingual students in Sweden, through a three-stage analytical process, the study revealed successful negotiation of multiple identities in written texts. In all three chapters, I felt inspired by the opportunities for shedding new light on multilingual literacy development afforded by the authors’ carefully crafted arguments. The implications certainly go beyond primary education.

Classroom-based technology-driven multilingual literacy comprises the two chapters in part 3. Multilingual interactions in chat rooms serve as the context for Chapter 8 by Melo-Pfeifer, in which an online platform was used for learners to interact in multiple Romance languages.

I really appreciated the expansion of literacies in this chapter to include both language and computer literacies. Through multilingual conversation analysis (which further helped to shift my thinking away from traditional ideas about literacy as focused solely on reading and writing), the author shows that learners could develop positive attitudes, knowledge, and skills – the three components of multiliteracies. In Chapter 9, Kirsch describes an app for storytelling with preschool learners in Luxembourg. In this study, the children’s linguistic resources served as invaluable assets in their literacy development through storytelling using the app, but it was well argued that the app alone is insufficient. Linguistically and culturally appropriate teaching approaches that are inclusive are needed to accompany the use of the app.

We are taken outside the classroom for part 4 to physical and virtual spaces that align with the chapters presented thus far. I found this part really helped to round out the scope of multilingual literacy development, given how much daily interactions outside classroom contexts can incorporate such development. In Chapter 10, Bergman Deitcher, Johnson, and Aram present a similar context with preschoolers and narrative approaches as seen in the previous chapter, but this time in homes in Israel where mostly English was used by their immigrant families from native English contexts. It is notable that the researchers took a quantitative approach to their investigation—the only chapter to include mean and standard deviation scores. They focused on the children’s language acquisition to measure word learning using sets of informational and narrative books, eight books in total. The results showed that the books used in the study at home did improve literacy in the target language and supported an interactive view of multiliteracy as well as a trans- languaging model. In Chapter 11, Stavans, Tahar Eden, and Azar take us back to digital technology to explore multilingual literacy development using emojis in online written communication. The authors note that emojis might serve as a universal language, posing the question, “can emojis become a language that embraces multilingualism in a much broader and deeper sense than we have ever known?” (Stavans et al., 2021, p. 673). Though their exploratory study did not seek to answer this question, the findings may help to expand translanguaging teaching practices to include non-language related semiotics.

In the final chapter, volume editors Stavans and Lindgren propose a ‘multilingual literacy bridge’ as part of the new linguistic reality that has been developing for decades, much of which was covered in the book. Developments in methods, motivations, language policies, formal and informal education systems, and technology are all outlined and framed by the idea of this new linguistic reality. I especially valued the use of the bridge metaphor and its associated tolls and taxes to describe the differences between individuals and societies crossing such a bridge. The chapter concludes with wise suggestions about observing, reflecting on, and interpreting new linguistic realities to support critical evaluation of multilingual literacy educational practices.

Although the concepts of multilingualism and multilingual literacies within the contexts represented in these chapters are familiar, allowing authors to take ideas further without having to provide detailed explanations of the contexts, it is that familiarity that might have been expanded on with the inclusion of other contexts, such as the very multilingual contexts of sub-Saharan Africa. I take, for example, a contribution to the book *The tyranny of writing: Ideologies of the written word*, in which Lüpke (2018) notes that orthographies developed by linguists and missionaries for West African languages should be abandoned in favor of “actually occurring literacy practices as a model” as a better way of capturing the fluid multilingualism in these contexts (p. 129). She argues that a “culturally anchored way of

writing” is more appropriate than the monolingual cultures of those European orthographies. I also note a dependency on English (except for Chapter 8) without problematising what this economic lingua franca has meant for multilingual literacy developments (although the link between languages and employability is raised in the final chapter). The influence of English as an academic lingua franca is raised in the editorial introduction chapter, but nowhere in the contributing chapters.

I found the engagement with literacies in this book to evoke some of the arguments made in an oft overlooked but worthwhile volume, *Literacy unbound: Multiliterate, multilingual, multimodal* (Dobinson & Dunworth, 2019), which has much more focus on higher education. However, aligned focus areas include teacher feedback, the promotion of authentic uses of language, and developments of ‘new realities’ of literacy. These new realities are inspired by communication via technology and are significant in the literature on multilingual literacies. One of the literacies missed was the idea of contextual literacy, which happens to be the chapter I contributed to the Dobinson and Dunworth volume (McKinley, 2019). I do wonder how concepts such as content and language integrated learning might be understood through a contextual literacy lens concerning integrated identities and realities.

Overall, I found the book to be well-written, with the different writer voices throughout the volume working together cohesively making for an accessible, consistent read from cover to cover. Equally, the individual chapters can stand sturdily on their own for those who choose to dip in and out. The book is clearly intended for an audience of both novice and advanced researchers of multilingual literacy but has a significant focus on practical issues that would be of great benefit to practitioners, especially for those looking to innovate their approaches to teaching. I have referred to the book in my own teaching of postgraduate TESOL, to encourage student teachers to consider the concept of multilingual multiliteracies in English L2 classroom practices. This has resulted in their rethinking the use of learners’ linguistic repertoires for both speaking and writing, strengthening arguments for the use of the L1 in the L2 classroom. I very much appreciate what the editors of *Multilingual Literacy* have done with this coherent and thought-provoking volume, as it has changed my understanding of literacy for the better.

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