

Book Reviews

Exploring Digital Communication: Language in Action. **Abingdon & New York; Routledge.**

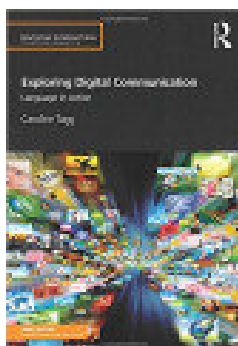
Caroline Tagg. (2015).

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Reviewed by: **Sanaz Marzban and Mojtaba Tajeri**



Exploring Digital Communication is one out of the series of 10 introductory level textbooks by Routledge, that cover the core topics in Applied Linguistics.

The book is divided into four parts- an introduction and three other sections. The sections consist of: A. Problems and Practices, B. Interventions and C. Theory. Each of these sections is further divided into two subsections which reflect linguistic issues relating to digital communication-digital language and literacy, and social issues and media. The book begins with an introduction in which the author examines the importance of digital communication across contemporary societies, and the concerns that people have about it. The author then goes on to emphasize on the collaborations that modern digital technology facilitates with other forms of communication. The argument that the author wants to put forward here is that insights from digital communication are not just important to study communication on digital platforms but have a much wider bearing onto our understanding of language and linguistics itself.

The author elaborates upon the practical issues related to digital communication, and proceeds to understand how developments in modern linguistics challenged some of the assumptions regarding the binaries that emerged with the advent of this new technology. For example, the author questions the separation of online communication from offline communication. The book tries to answer two important questions. Firstly, why should online (computer-mediated/internet-mediated) communication be looked at differently from offline communication? Secondly, why should one focus on language related problems associated with the internet, such as privacy, harassment and social isolation. Addressing these questions is central to understanding what this book attempts to do. The book begins with the "Problems and Practices" commonly linked with digital media. This section, as the name suggests, elaborates on some of the challenges that digital platform poses to us, such as, digital literacy, its effects on how we picture ourselves, the fears that people have about it, its exotic nature, questions it raises about our privacy and its ability to connect us with others. It is argued that our understanding of these problems and practices and our ability to respond to them will necessarily include our understanding how language is being used across digital spaces, such as the internet. The first subsection has four chapters: "Is digital communication ruining language?"; "Has the web changed how we read?"; "Is the web devaluing what it means to be an author?"; "Does the internet further the global dominance of English?". The second subsection also comprises of four chapters: "From anonymity to self-promotion: Are we ever ourselves on social media?"; "What are the implications of social media for privacy?"; "Is social media

making us less social offline?"; "What can be done about trolls and online bullying?"

Through these questions in section A, the author tries to explain terms such as web, digital, media, privacy, and communication. She then goes on to look at interventions from within applied linguistics; that is, ways in which applied linguists have sought to look beyond popular descriptions of challenges that digital communication is posing to us to understand through practical investigation what people are actually doing when they communicate digitally. The first subsection has the following chapters: "Why digital communication may be good for literacy"; "Exploring digital literacies"; "Using the web as a space for writing"; "Using more than one language online". The second subsection is divided into four chapters: "Performing identity online"; "Audience design on social media"; "Constructing virtual communities and the linguistics of online aggression".

The chief concerns of the book in section B include digital literacy, practical investigation of language use on an online platform, online identity, social media and virtual communities. In section C, the author steps back to deliberate on the theoretical insights from linguistics, primarily sociolinguistics and applied linguistics, and argues in favor of "practices approach to language", which expands the purview of language to the point that anything that aids communication can be understood through the lens of language. This allows the author to include a variety of digital practices, such as the green light that signifies 'availability' on Skype and other platforms, within the domain of language. To develop upon these linkages between theoretical insights from linguistics and the actual challenges of the digital space concepts such as Multiliteracies, Translanguaging via a superdiverse Internet and Heteroglossia are explored in the first subsection, and in the second subsection: Identities in interaction and Sociolinguistic communities.

This book is a useful resource for students starting their studies in applied linguistics as well as general readers interested in the subject. It is part of a series of books which take a "practice to theory" approach, with a "back-to-front" structure. This takes the reader from the reality of problems and issues, through a discussion of possible interventions, before finally relating these practical issues to theoretical foundations.

The author attempts to clarify any perceived divide between online and offline communication and argues that issues raised in relation to digital communication throw light on language use and practices in general, and thus linguistic interventions in this area have an impact not only on users of digital communication but also on linguists' general understanding of language and society. The research discussed in the book is situated in the well-established discipline of applied linguistics; a field of language-related study that is transforming how we conceptualize language and thus how different languages, speakers, and practices are evaluated. The book goes on to show that although language-focused research cannot resolve social problems single-handedly, it can play an important role in understanding and addressing them, and thus language-related research has much to contribute to contemporary discussions about the internet.

The book is generally well written in an informal and accessible expression. However, at times it relies on a certain familiarity with linguistic terminology which should not be problematic for readers of discourse and society, but may be a barrier for novices in this field. Although the format seems innovative and exciting, at times the text may seem a little disorganized with a lot of both back and forward referencing. This does become clearer once the whole book has been read. However, there is the distinct absence of a conclusion to bring together the mentioned issues and to pull together the

practical examples with the theories that have been discussed in the chapters.

With a vast bibliography of more than 600 references, this book provides many opportunities to the readers to extend their knowledge by studying the texts referenced and to look more deeply at the relevant research examples given by the author. The author has also included tasks with commentaries, a glossary of key terms and a further reading section, making this textbook a useful resource for both students and professionals returning to academic study.

Sanaz Marzban is a research scholar at Panjab University, Chandigarh, working in the area of online communication in language teaching.

sanazmrzbn@gmail.com

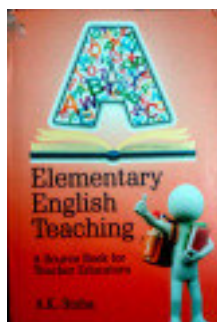
Mojtaba Tajeri is a research scholar at Panjab University, Chandigarh and has submitted his PhD thesis on digital storytelling.

mojtabatajери@gmail.com

Elementary English Teaching: A Source Book for Teacher Educators. Delhi: Shipra Publications. A. K. Sinha. (2016).

ISBN- 978-81-7541-848-6

Reviewed by: **Praveen Singh**



The book *Elementary English Teaching* by Anjani Kumar Sinha is a welcome addition to the stock of aids for teachers and teacher-educators. Even though the sub-title clearly states that the book is meant for teacher-educators, I think that teachers teaching the English language can also benefit a great deal

from this book. It is a relatively thin book of approximately 210 pages, but it has a lot of valuable insights for both parties. The book is divided into six units which comprise of a total of sixteen chapters. The six units and the chapters comprising those units are:

- I) English language in primary school curriculum: Chapters 1-6
- II) Language skills: Chapter 7
- III) Language skills: Reading and writing: Chapters 8-10
- IV) Lesson planning and material development: Chapters 11-14
- V) Assessment and evaluation: Chapter 15
- VI) Practicum: Chapter 16

Unit I, true to its title introduces the problem of language acquisition and how in many ways learning and teaching of language is different from other subjects. According to the author English language plays an important role considering the extremely diverse nature of India and the importance of teaching English at the primary school level in India is emphasized and argued for. The author then introduces the reader to the significant ideas in the field of language and language teaching such as innateness hypothesis, second language, critical period hypothesis, characteristics of a language, etc. All these concepts are discussed and explained very lucidly and anyone seeking an elementary understanding of these notions is bound to like the book for its wide coverage. Experiments conducted on higher primates such as Chimpanzees are then used to detail out the complexity and uniqueness of human language. Unit I also includes a discussion on issues such as bilingualism, steps of language learning and different modes of reading, among others.

In Unit II, the author discusses the issues related to speaking and listening, and the factors affecting them in general to begin with, for example, the time lag between listening and