

Spaces of Multilingualism
Edited by Robert Blackwood & Unn Røyneland

Athil Khaleel Farhan
Mustansiriyah University
Iraq

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Aim of the Book

Multilingualism is now one of the most distinctive features of contemporary sociolinguistic realities, shaping communication in several fields, such as migration, education, media, public institutions as well as everyday interaction. Increased mobility and global interconnectedness have created communication environments in which languages rarely remain confined within fixed national or monolingual boundaries. This resulted in multilingualism being no longer conceptualised as an exceptional phenomenon, but rather as a normal condition of linguistic life.

In recent decades, academic studies have shifted from viewing multilingualism as an additional set of languages. Instead, it is now viewed as a contextual social practice usually shaped by ideology, mobility and interaction (Pennycook, 2010; Shohamy & Gorter, 2008). From this perspective, multilingualism is seen as connected to issues of power, legitimacy, belonging and visibility. These developments have opened promising venues for intersections with applied linguistics and literacy studies, in which multilingual realities shape reading practices in both academic classes and public environments.

Spaces of Multilingualism, edited by Robert Blackwood and Unn Røyneland (2022), contributes significantly to this modern prospect by highlighting that multilingualism is spatially embedded. The book is presented as a tribute to Elizabeth Lanza, whose work has influenced the fields of sociolinguistics, multilingual interaction research and linguistic landscape studies. Instead of adopting a single theoretical stance, the book brings together diverse perspectives to investigate

how multilingualism is organised across institutional, migratory, semiotic as well as ideological “spaces”.

Although the book’s main focus is not on foreign language reading pedagogy, the editors consistently highlight multilingual environments as textual ecologies, i.e., spaces where interaction with languages usually occurs through signs, media clips, inscriptions and everyday written interaction. These perspectives are highly relevant to researchers in foreign language literacy, where reading largely expands beyond classroom texts into multilingual public space (Street, 2003).

Structure of the Book

One of the distinctive features of this book is its collaborative design. Each chapter is co-authored by two scholars, which reflects the dialogical nature of research in multilingualism as a dialogical field by its nature. The chapters of the book are grouped into four coherent parts offering a broad yet integrated investigation of multilingualism across institutional, social and semiotic domains.

Part I: Contexts and institutional spaces. The opening section places multilingualism within institutional and ideological frameworks, explaining how multilingual practices are shaped by governance regimes, educational policies as well as structural inequalities. The chapters highlight the way in which institutional spaces interpret “legitimate” multilingualism, whereas other linguistic resources remain marginalised or even invisible. This approach is consistent with Spolsky’s (2004) argument that, beside official documents, language policy can also be created through everyday institutional practice.

Many contributions stress the relevance of these contexts for educational engagement, proposing that opportunities for multilingual literacy are often shaped by ideological hierarchies that regulate which languages are usually seen as valuable in public life and in schooling.

Part II: Interaction, migration and multilingual identities. The second part shifts from institutional macrostructures to multilingualism as a lived experience, with a focus on migrants’ pathways, identity negotiation and ideological struggle. Here, multilingual speakers do not appear as abstract subjects speaking more than one language, but rather as individuals who handle complex biographies and shift linguistic affiliations.

For example, contributions that explore communication practices among migrants illustrate how multilingualism can intersect with belonging and social recognition. Such views align with Norton’s (2013) emphasis on identity as a key element in language learning and literacy engagement. The chapters collectively affirm the view that the practices of reading and writing are never socially neutral, but are rooted in different experiences, such as inclusion, exclusion and linguistic authority.

Part III: Linguistic landscapes as readable multilingual spaces. This part is one of the most innovative contributions in the book, as it focuses explicitly on research into the linguistic landscape and the visibility of multilingualism in the public sphere. Languages are studied not

only as spoken resources, but also as semiotic signs that are displayed through shopfronts, advertisements, institutional signs as well as public inscriptions.

A particularly illustrative example is given in the chapter co-authored by Androutsopoulos and Deumert. In this chapter, the authors treat multilingual kiosk signs as a physical representation of everyday language negotiation. These analyses confirm that multilingualism is not only spoken but can also be read in the environments in which individuals live.

This part is of special value for readers of *Reading in a Foreign Language* due to the fact that linguistic landscapes can often be seen as extended literacy environments. Foreign language readers increasingly “read the city” when reading textbooks, and face multilingual parts that require reasoning, cross linguistic awareness and semiotic flexibility (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Shohamy & Gorter, 2008). In this sense, multilingual signs become authentic reading inputs that move literacy beyond the boundaries of classrooms.

Part IV: Concluding remarks. The last part concludes with Crispin Thurlow’s chapter “Besides Hegemonic Multilingualism: Making Space for Little Stories and Complex Biographies” (Thurlow, 2022, pp. 215–233). Thurlow gives a critical counterpoint to the discourses of celebratory multilingualism, warning that multilingual spaces can sometimes reproduce inequality and commodification even in cases where they appear inclusive.

By drawing the attention to “little stories” as well as marginal biographies that remain excluded from the mainstream narratives, Thurlow stresses both ideological and political dimensions of the multilingual space. This contribution is among the most thought-provoking elements in this book, as it highlights that multilingualism is not merely a means of communication, but is deeply intertwined with power (Thurlow, 2022, pp. 227–228).

Reviewer Commentary

Overall, *Spaces of Multilingualism* is a valuable, sophisticated and conceptually rich addition to the field of contemporary sociolinguistics. Its main strength lies in framing multilingualism as spatially embedded; a perspective in which multilingualism is not treated as an abstract competence, but rather materially organised through institutions, identities, mobility as well as semiotic landscapes.

The interdisciplinary breadth of the book is praiseworthy, as it combines several perspectives from language policy, migration studies, interactional sociolinguistics and research on linguistic landscape. The co-authored chapter format contributes to strengthening the internal coherence and dialogue, as it presents complementary viewpoints rather than isolated arguments.

However, one of the potential limitations is that the book’s treatment of the topic of reading foreign languages remains indirect. Readers who seek a clear and explicit discussion of L2 reading comprehension or classroom teaching can find only limited immediate connections. Nevertheless, the conceptual tools presented in the book are largely applicable to literacy researchers, especially when investigating reading beyond formal educational texts into multilingual public environments.

Spaces of Multilingualism will be valuable to researchers in the fields of sociolinguistics, multilingualism studies, language policy and language landscapes. It will also be of great interest to researchers interested in foreign language literacy, as it highlights multilingual environments as expanded semiotic spaces of textual encounter and interpretation.

The book deserves a place in academic libraries as well as the reading lists of graduate students who focus on the evolving convergence of language, literacy, space and mobility. Readers interested in multilingual literacy beyond the classroom, including the study of public texts as authentic reading environments, will find this book appropriate and stimulating.

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About the author

Athil Khaleel Farhan received her PhD degree in Linguistics and Translation Studies from the University of Surrey, United Kingdom. She is now a Senior Lecturer in the department of Translation at Mustansiriyah University. Her research interests include corpus linguistics, discourse analysis, translation and interpretation.

Email: a.farhan@uomustansiriyah.edu.iq