

***Virtual English as a Lingua Franca: Investigating the Discourse of Digital Exchanges and Understanding Technology-Enhanced Learning***

Inmaculada Pineda and Rino Bosso (Eds.). New York: Routledge. 2023. Pp. v + 262.

The edited volume *Virtual English as a Lingua Franca: Investigating the Discourse of Digital Exchanges and Understanding Technology-Enhanced Learning* edited by Pineda and Bosso (2023) is the first book ever to be published with a focus on the study of virtual English as a lingua franca. This collection of empirical studies seeks to present a comprehensive account of the development of intercultural communication strategies through virtual English as a lingua franca, reflecting on the ways in which we make pragmatic meaning in today's technology-informed, globalized world. This work emphasizes analyzing transmodal, trans-semiotic, and transcultural discourse practices in online spaces, providing a counterpoint to existing English as a lingua franca (ELF) research which has leaned towards unpacking formal features of ELF communication in face-to-face interactions.

The main research questions raised in this book are: What is Virtual English as a lingua franca (VELF)? How can researchers describe the pragmatic and semiotic resources used in VELF in multiple digital and geographical contexts? What are the differences and similarities among VELF exchanges that occur in various digital contexts? How can researchers analyze naturally-occurring VELF communication? What, if any, is the impact of VELF exchanges on learning processes? How does the recent trans-shift in applied linguistics research affect our perception and realization of VELF? And what implications do the findings deriving from the research questions above have on our understanding of global digital communication in English?

This work features scholars from across the fields of applied linguistics, language education, digital communication, and intercultural communication. In this edited collection of works, the authors draw on previous work in ELF (Crystal, 2016; Eberhard et al., 2019; Jenkins et al., 2017; Mauranen, 2017; Seidlhofer, 2011), and prompt further reflection on readers' own experiences in online settings and the challenges of VELF, while also supplying educators in these contexts with the analytical tools to better bridge the gap between formal and informal learning. It employs an overlap of four theoretical standpoints regarding VELF communication: transcultural strategies, translanguaging practices, transmodal resources, and trans-epistemic processes. These works help readers to understand "the use of English as a means for transcultural digital communication, especially among international users in online spaces, such as in Online Social Networks" (p.1). This book is about "recognizing and understanding the variable manifestations of English in online intercultural communication, what characterizes transcultural meaning-making processes, and how these are sustained also via the use of non-verbal semiotic resources" (p.1).

The book is organized into three primary areas of research with three chapters in each section. The introductory chapter outlines the research questions and provides a summary of the chapters in the book, providing a roadmap for scholars interested in VELF, from the

conceptualization of ELF and how it has been researched historically to how the study of VELF has arisen in our increasingly technology-driven, globalized world. Part I, “Analyzing VELF discourse,” provides the reader with an overview exploring how VELF communication is understood and analyzed. This section establishes and illustrates the different frameworks used in VELF research.

Chapter 1, “Understanding hybridity in VELF exchanges: Overt, covert, and technology-enhanced translational phenomena,” by Rina Bosso, explores the complex nature of VELF communication in Facebook exchanges between international students living in a dormitory in Vienna, Austria. This longitudinal investigation of communicative routines employed by members of a particular Multicultural Hybrid Community (MHC) illuminates the role played by overt, covert, and technology-enhanced translational processes when making meaning via VELF. This chapter considers the communicative forces expressed by study participants through various pragmatic strategies. This chapter also reflects on the link between the classroom and the complex communicative reality of the 21st-century world. An understanding of this link can provide educators with opportunities to use task-based learning approaches in the classroom.

In Chapter 2, “Virtual English as a lingua franca, transmodal, translingual, and transcultural strategies in Twitter: The case study of @EEII\_UMA,” Inmaculada Pineda discusses the intersection of several overlapping theories (transcultural, translingual, transmodal, and transempiric) used to understand VELF. This research draws from a corpus of Twitter data compiled during the mandatory lockdown period in Spain because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The data demonstrates how informal learning environments, such as Twitter, can become virtual spaces where learners can continue to explore English, as well as the content that they learn in class, through interacting with the official Twitter account of the Degree in English Studies at the University of Málaga (Spain).

Chapter 3, “A multimodal and translanguaging approach to video-mediated interaction in Virtual English as a lingua franca contexts,” by Maria Grazia Sindoni, puts forward a multimodal and translanguaging approach to video-mediated interaction. This chapter presents a comprehensive transmodal framework for analyzing VELF in video communication and fostering digital literacy among tertiary-level international students. The author employs a threefold approach: first, student learning is sustained through face-to-face classes on multimodal digital literacies. Second, there are workshops on various digital text types. Finally, peer review is conducted among students. Students also had the opportunity to participate in their own naturally-occurring, video-mediated VELF exchanges, developing robust translingual and multisemiotic repertoires, as well as meta-reflective skills.

In Part II, “Creativity in VELF,” contributors explore naturally- or quasi-naturally-occurring exchanges in the various contexts of poetry, online forums, and digital platforms purposefully designed for learning. In Chapter 4, “Virtual Singlish as a lingua franca: Translingual entrepreneurship through poetry,” authors Eunice Lim and Suresh Canagarajah offer an analysis of translingual, transmodal, and transcultural practices in Singlish poetry and argue for the use of Translingual Entrepreneurship as a framework to explore meaning and flexibility both in VELF and in Virtual Singlish as a lingua franca (VSLF) communication. Through exploring international readers’ perspectives towards translingual Singlish poetry

written by Joshua Ip, the authors argue for further reflection on the validity of Singlish as a virtual lingua franca.

Chapter 5, “Exploring creativity and competence in online discussion forums using Virtual English as a lingua franca,” presents an investigation by Zhichang Xu into creativity and competence in online discussion forums by university students who were enrolled in an intercultural writing course at an Australian university. Xu uses a discourse analytic approach to analyze VELF data collected in 2020 and 2021 from two cohorts at Monash University. Xu’s results show that learners used a variety of strategies to decode the multilingual and transcultural references, and, at the same time, they developed their meta-ELF competence, which includes both multilingual awareness and effective transcultural communication strategies in a VELF context.

Next, in Chapter 6, “I’m so jealous: A corpus-pragmatic analysis of compliments and praise in Virtual English as a lingua franca (VELF),” Boudjemaa Dedenne uses a transmodal and translinguistic approach in order to examine a corpus of over 1,100 instances of compliments and praise. This corpus is sourced from an international cooperation project promoting telecollaborative writing. This project included participants from six different countries in Asia, Europe, North Africa, and Latin America. The findings are categorized into two different levels: first, a lexico-grammar description of compliments and implied positive evaluations; and second, a categorization of transmodal elements in the corpus into compliment/praise-supporting elements (e.g., emojis, laughter, lengthening of letters in positive words) or compliment/praise-generating (e.g., images, hyperlinks). The results of this study highlight the formulaicity and predictability of compliment/praise tokens and provide notes on pragmatic instruction for teachers to move away from idealized native-speaker models to a more communicative model that highlights linguistic, interactional, and semiotic resources to achieve reciprocal understanding and rapport building.

Part III, “Teaching experiences and teacher training through/with VELF,” is devoted to pedagogical experiences with VELF, including VELF activities and teacher training for pre-service teachers. In Chapter 7, “Exploring the impact of virtual exchange in Virtual English as a lingua franca (VELF): Views on self-efficacy and motivation,” authors Anna Nicolaou and Ana Sevilla Pavón explore the perceptions of self-efficacy and motivation in business students from Cyprus and Spain after engaging in VELF exchanges. Students who were observed in the project developed digital literacy and several related skills, including the use of immersive 3D virtual reality software, asynchronous communication, tools for digital storytelling, and website creation. The authors examine the students’ virtual exchanges, highlighting the language adopted as a lingua franca. While collaborating, students used English as the shared language in their virtual, task-based exchanges. The authors report on various benefits that the students documented from virtual collaboration, such as their increased ability to interact with people with different accents when speaking English, as well as an increased ability to problem-solve and minimize language barriers through the development of communication strategies.

In Chapter 8, “Designing synchronous online learning experiences with social media as semiotic technologies,” author Fei Victor Lim focuses on social media as semiotic technologies and highlights their utility in designing meaningful online learning experiences for students in

order to foster both collaborative knowledge building and the development of multimodal skills. Lim's study focuses on the use of the former online educational platform Edmodo for synchronous online learning. The author suggests that one advantage of using similar platforms is that exchanges among students started during class time can be extended to outside of class time, sustaining further unsupervised learning. The author highlights the importance of the inclusion of support for digital multimodal composing, and the effects of this support on the students to create a variety of digital artifacts that represent their learning in new ways.

In Chapter 9, "VELF in pre-service teacher education: Insights from Brazilian ELT," Eduardo H. Diniz de Figueiredo, Lucielen Porfirio, and Sávio Siqueira present and discuss a number of VELF activities to expand pre-service and in-service teachers' awareness of VELF, and the different translanguaging, transmodal, transcultural, and trans-epistemic strategies that it entails. Through exploring English online from a micro perspective, the authors suggest multiple tasks that work to illustrate social efforts for digital interaction with an awareness that the complexity of language and communication should be the core of a practical and fruitful experience in English learning. The volume concludes with a summary of the main takeaways from each chapter, as well as an outlook for future research and implications.

As the first of its kind, this work provides a foundation for understanding VELF and current trends in research regarding online communication for learning and interaction using English as a lingua franca. In an increasingly globalized world, the influence and importance of VELF cannot be understated. The empirical studies and theoretical discussions provide a comprehensive view of VELF, making it an essential read for anyone interested in exploring language use in digital environments. The inclusion of case studies and real-world examples further enriches the content, making it both accessible and relevant to practitioners in the field. The interdisciplinary nature of this book, integrating applied linguistics, digital communication, and intercultural studies, makes it a valuable resource for a wide audience, including researchers, educators, and learners.

The authors hope that this book will give readers insight into the following pragmatic issues. First, researchers may find new theories that support a better understanding of intercultural communication in digital settings, the learning processes that unfold through naturally-occurring VELF exchanges, as well as suitable methodologies for investigating these. Second, instructors may be provided with useful insights on activities that students can be offered, both in the classroom and in real-life contexts, to stimulate the continuous development of 21st-century skills and global competence through the engagement in, and analysis of, VELF exchanges. Finally, learners can be made aware of the benefits of VELF exchanges while learning about the communication processes that take place in naturally-occurring VELF exchanges. Overall, an understanding of VELF communication serves to foster an awareness of this type of complex communication, as well as of possible communication strategies that can be employed. In summary, this book aims to support teachers and students to develop a sensitivity towards their ability to adapt English flexibly to their online communicative needs in a globalized world.

## MIRIAH RALSTON

*Teachers College, Columbia University*

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