

Review of *Understanding multimodal discourses in English language teaching textbooks: Implications for students and practitioners*, written by C.A. Smith (2022). Bloomsbury Publishing, 231 pp. ISBN 978-1-350-25695-8

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When I was in junior high school in China, I regarded textbooks as the undoubted source of knowledge even though more than 2000 years ago Mencius had already reminded people ‘Do not blindly believe everything written in books.’ However, since I knew nothing about English at that time, the English textbook was a holy book to me as a thirteen-year-old boy living in a rural area in China in 1994. My English teacher was so committed to the textbooks that she would assign every classmate an English name only because all main characters in the textbooks had English names. To be honest, I felt uncomfortable when she called me David. This might be the reason I keep using my Chinese (and only) name even though I study and live in the UK now. This personal vignette shows the struggle faced by English practitioners and learners in expanding-circle nations when dealing with English and English textbooks, the ostensible carrier of legitimate linguistic knowledge, and embedded power relations and ideologies. To help English teachers and learners critically engage with the multimodal discourses in English language teaching (ELT) textbooks, Christopher A. Smith, in his book *Understanding multimodal discourses in English language teaching textbooks: Implications for students and practitioners*, proposes a triangulated framework to analyse underlying ideological perceptions and cultural values in ELT textbooks.

Before Smith expounds his framework in Chapters 2 - 4, he first discusses the production and consumption of ELT textbooks in Chapter 1. The production of ELT textbooks is mainly focused on maximizing global sales rather than the concerns of English practitioners and learners. In terms of consumption, Smith regards English practitioners and learners as the primary consumers of ELT textbooks, and they play a significant role in negotiating multimodal content in the textbooks in classrooms. Smith holds that ELT textbooks are never neutral, which necessitates various critical studies of ELT textbooks. Through a concise literature review, he concludes that there is a dearth of critical studies of ELT textbooks, especially those investigating underlying power relations and ideologies in textbooks. He sees this book and the framework he proposes as his response to the paucity.

Chapter 2 presents the first component of the triangulated framework, which is the Critical Multimodal Analysis Template (CMAT) framework. Smith derives this framework from contextual analysis of multimodal discourses in ELT textbooks and theoretical analysis of the foundations of critical discourse studies. In CMAT, he proposes the multimodal discourse analysis of ELT textbooks can be conducted through five lenses sequentially, namely the holistic lens, inventory lens, latent lens, compositional lens, and critical lens. Detailed questions are provided to assist the analysis in each lens. A vignette is followed in the chapter to show how CMAT can be applied to analyze a globally published ELT textbook, *Top Notch*. At the end of the chapter, Smith maintains the analysis of multimodal

discourses in ELT textbooks should be corroborated by how these textbooks are negotiated in the classroom, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapters 3 and 4 present the second and third components of the triangulated framework respectively, a Multimodal Analysis of Visually Recorded English Classrooms (MAVREC) and a Semi-Structured Interview Coding framework (SSInC). Smith suggests that MAVREC and SSInC should be deployed to validate the analysis of the multimodal discourses because, from an ecological perspective of language teaching, the multimodal discourses in ELT textbooks will be consumed by teachers and learners through context-dependent negotiations in the classroom. Furthermore, he notes that it is essential to understand how teachers and students evaluate the negotiated multimodal discourses in ELT textbooks since they are the major consumers of these globally published ELT textbooks. At the end of both chapters, detailed illustrations of how to use the two frameworks are also provided through empirical vignettes.

In Chapter 5, Smith foregrounds the triangulation in critical discourse studies and presents the synopsis of CMAT, MAVREC, and SSInC. A detailed synthesis of the findings of three vignettes in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 is illustrated as a sample. Smith concludes that the three components are in a linear alignment for English practitioners and learners to use. At the same time, he advocates that there are alternatives to how this triangulated framework can be applied and combined with other possibilities. He maintains the fundamental part of the framework is CMAT, but researchers can adapt MAVREC and SSInC by deploying other methods to investigate the negotiated multimodal discourses in ELT textbooks and how they are perceived by English teachers and learners.

I was wondering who the possible readers of this book would be when I was writing this review. English teachers in expanding-circle nations? Could well be. However, they might be concerned with how much space they can have to critically analyse the multimodal discourses in ELT textbooks under test-centric regimes. English textbooks tend to be considered the legitimate source of knowledge for test preparation. This notion may be quite different from the one illustrated in this book, which problematises textbooks as carriers of ideological assumptions and cultural values. I believe that one of the most precious takeaways from this book for English practitioners in expanding-circle nations would be the raised awareness of applying criticality in the engagement of multimodal discourses in ELT textbooks or academic books.

### **About the author**

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