



Book review: Ennser-Kananen, J., & Saarinen, *New Materialist Explorations into Language Education*. Springer Nature. Cham, Springer. 2023, 190 pages. ISBN: 9783031138478, 9783031138478

Zohre Mohammadi Zenouzagh

Associate Professor, Department of English Teaching and Translation, Karaj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Karaj, Iran
<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8430-2695>
Zohre.mohamadi@kiaau.ac.ir
Zohreh.Zenooz@gmail.com

While traditionally applied linguistics centralized language and language users, posthumanist approaches towards education suggest revisiting the interplay between the environment and the objects in it (Pennycook, 2018). Given that our environment is surrounded by materials, focusing on what humans do would mask a vast part of reality including the fact that materials also play an agentive role (Toohey, 2019). From *sociomaterialist* perspective, people, objects, and discourses are in constant relation and in continuous change together. This perspective rejects the traditional dual and hierarchical relation between human and non-human artifacts, a tradition in which human agency was emphasized. The new materialism views “linguaging as evanescent assemblage of speakers, listeners and environments” (Toohey, 2018).

New Materialist Explorations into Language Education explicates the influential role of social constructionist and new materialism in challenging equity in language education. The book reflects a critical and transformative perspective and fosters ontological-ethical grounding that implicates repositioning researchers for decentralizing them as human agents and focusing on materialities that often play a central role but under covered one. Post humanism encourages researchers to view the society as an ethical interplay between human and non-human assemblages that explore socio-materialities of language education. The book is organized in five parts and ten chapters: an acceptable account of three concerns: a) the emerging and influential role of *material agencies* in language teaching contexts, b) the relation between materialities and educational choices we make, and c) human and non-human assemblages in language education contexts. Each chapter explores how agents other than humans enlighten agency in language education context.

ARTICLE INFO

Book Review

Received: Friday, November 18, 2022

Accepted: Monday, November 21, 2022

Published: Thursday, December 1, 2022

Available Online: Monday, November 21, 2022

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.22049/JALDA.2022.28106.1488>

Online ISSN: 2821-0204; Print ISSN: 2820-8986



© The Author(s)

The first chapter introduces the book mentioning that the book dissects language education in a society and acknowledges the interplay in which humans socially construct reality and its dynamic connection to the material world. The approach of posthumanism is what the authors of this book adapted to explain the ways in which anthropocentric thinking postulates how humans relate their materials and mediated environment and the ways in which logocentrism implicates language as a superior means of meaning making. All in all, it investigates how humans ethically entangled and implicated with their material environment.

The second chapter reflects the role of material agency by examining intra actions from a language classroom with a telepresence robot. The first chapter reflects the complexity of the interplay between human and machine agency in remote classroom participation which triggers a demand for intricate mediation of social and material realities. Interactional data analyzed by conversation analytics from synchronous hybrid foreign language classrooms in higher education in which participants can move the robot and reorient the space indicates how telepresence technology configures a kind of “stand-in” for a human that creates a create environment maximizing agency for teachers and students.

Chapter three represents how understating the materiality of modern language test and the way students interact with them can help configure the mediating role of material objects such as papers, desks, etc. and can force the students to act in a specific way. The most significant change in recent assessments has been the digitization of paper-based assessments since the 2000s. Danish National test and the Finnish Matriculation examination were compared focusing on the interplay between human participants and computerized systems and human-machine agency in these large-scale tests. The chapter continues with the implications for test takers and their agency. The interaction that computerized systems of test-taking offer, the familiarity with the testing process, and the possibility of being aware of the failure and success in digital testing are among the factors affecting agency in students.

In chapter four, the community-engaged service-learning context as a blended learning context in which foreign language learners are meaningfully and relevantly engaged in society is examined from materialist perspective. It can be described as a course-based, “credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs”. In this chapter, long-term ethnographic field work analysis of Finish language learners in Canada visiting Finish senior citizens shows how the entangled agency profoundly builds the assemblage and highlights important possibilities for the analysis of time, space, and belonging. From post humanism perspective, humans are not the only agents in controlling the environment; rather, they interact with materials and the assemblage emerges as the mediating agent. “New materialism investigates what happens if materialities were actors alongside and within us, and further what is the significance when trajectories and powers irreducible to the meanings, intentions, or symbolic values humans can invest in them” (p.70).

Chapter 5 discusses the application of personal repertoire in language learning. It elaborates on how personal repertoire built on students’ agentic activity in socially structured environment and the related materials drives learner

development. The repertoire is therefore not a language rather a skilled linguistic action. Instead of looking at language learning as interplay between social and cognitive orientation, from ecological point of view, learning a language is being involved in languaging. Rather than denying what is called social, human language has been approached as an ecology of events that connects it to the embodiment of human agents and the materiality of the environment and its various tools. The chapter ends with a call for research on how materiality plays a role in the development of student repertoire.

Chapter 6 discusses the integral and material role of languages in the spatial repertoire of learning environments. Well-documented research indicates how school actions and pedagogical designs are affected by facilitative and restrictive materials conditions and school premises. The investigation of school separation based on language, in this case, Finnish and Danish languages undermines the co-located schools: the schools that use Multilanguage. In co-located schools, language learning is promoted more than structured, planned forms of multilingual education. The co-located schools can help teachers recognize an assemblage resource for pedagogical change. From materialist perspective, repertoires enacted are best understood in terms of “spatial distribution, social practices and material embodiment rather than individual competence of the sociolinguistic actor”. The chapters conclude by referring to evidence that indicates changing physical learning context can effectively result in more language variety than structured, curriculum-based forms of designed multilingualism.

Chapter 7 argues that research in language education indicates that the choice of language no matter whether it is made by parents, students or policies reflects social and material realities. In this chapter, the interview data from two contexts of Finland and Mozambique indicated that materiality affects parental choices with respect to language learning. Whereas Finland parental choices are related to the physical space, materiality in the form of income and educational outcome were the determinants of parental choices in Mozambique. The (non-) negotiability of choice becomes more pronounced when we think of choice as an assemblage of social materials. So, it can no longer be considered as genuinely flexible. Rather, choices should be viewed in response to their negotiability with choice makers in the learning environment.

Chapter 8 explores ways to empirically investigate the intertwined relationships between matter and society in teachers' perceptions of change. Adopting a rhizomatic assemblage technique, teachers' interviews were studied to specify multiplicity of various factors that interferingly, hierarchically, and linearly affect change in teachers. A rhizomatic assemblage technique is not considering teacher interview data as exact representation of teacher perceptions. This shift in method of data analysis implies shifting from human to an assemblage of human and non-human agents to show the vital role of interaction between them. From Materialist perspective, the rhizomatic approach in data collection questions the role of power and signifies the role in assemblages. This implies that power and control are not stable agents. But they play affective social, temporal, and special roles in assemblages. This chapter signifies the interaction between societal factors such as

professional identity, educational materials such as peer work, and the way materiality can limit or compete in assemblage and affect educational practices and policies.

In Chapter 9, textbooks were also viewed as material and non-human agents that play facilitative and debilitating in classrooms. Textbooks promote ideal learner behavior, conceptualize, and operationalize and facilitate self-assessment. Discursive analysis of self-assessment of textbooks which includes not only its analysis of what to learn but also social aspects that highlights how, where, and with whom we learn and materials in learning environment such as handouts and school spaces was utilized in the analysis of agency of textbooks. Besides, using self-assessment as the unit of analysis, we can identify how the key tasks, exercises, activities, and tests suggested in the textbook represent learners' expected agency. The results indicated pedagogical ergonomic role of textbooks in shaping human-object engagement in classroom.

Chapter 10 concludes the key findings on the whole chapters suggesting that materialism in post humanism is understanding human in an ethical relationship with the material environment which goes hand in hand with a process of improving equity among humans. Critical posthumanist realism can be seen as an anti-oppressive frame in that it both encourages and enables researchers to commit to ethically grounded relations in their research.

References

- Ennser-Kananen, J., & Saarinen, T. (2023). *New Materialist Explorations into Language Education*. Cham: Springer Nature.
- Pennycook, A. (2018). Applied linguistics as epistemic assemblage. *AILA review*, 31(1), 113-134. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1075/aila.00015.pen>
- Toohey, K. (2018). Bristol, Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters.
- Toohey, K. (2019). The onto-epistemologies of new materialism: Implications for applied linguistics pedagogies and research. *Applied linguistics*, 40(6), 937-956. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/applin/amy046>

Author's Biography



Zohre Mohamadi Zenouzagh is an associate professor at English translation department of Islamic Azad University, Karaj Branch, Karaj, Iran, and a Visiting Scholar, ICLON Leiden University Graduate School of Teaching, Leiden University, Leiden, the Netherlands. She has published several articles on writing skill and computer assisted language learning. Currently she is working on teacher education and development.
