Review of Maria Grazia Sindoni. 2013. *Spoken and Written Discourse in Online Interactions: A Multimodal Approach.* London: Routledge.
Author's manuscript: final version

Maria Grazia Sindoni, Spoken and Written Discourse in Online Interactions: A Multimodal Approach, London: Routledge, 2013; x + 240 pp., ISBN 9780415523165, US$125.00 (hbk).

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This book continues the *Routledge Studies in Multimodality* series by examining orality and literacy in online discourse beyond the purely verbal mode. Sindoni sets out to investigate how spoken and written discourse have been changed by their transplantation into virtual environments. The study relies on multimodality as an umbrella theory but complements it with a range of methods from social sciences: digital ethnography, Conversation Analysis, and corpus linguistics.

The first chapter lays out the theoretical foundation by giving an account of orality and literacy from two perspectives: sociohistorical and linguistic. Sindoni problematizes the view that speech and writing are two clear-cut abstract modes and construes them as two different ideologies ingrained into systems of cultural domination. But in the age of the Internet, new technological and semiotic resources seem to erase all cultural differences instantiated by the oral/written divide (p. 20). The overlap inspires the book's innovative unit of analysis – 'mode-switching', the Internet users' practice of combining audio/video exchanges with written comments in the same communicative event, synchronically and for specific interactional purposes. The linguistic features characteristic of the written and spoken modes are adapted to the discussion of online environments and represented in clear tables which make this chapter a good reference resource for the linguistic study of computer-mediated communication (CMC).

The second chapter turns to the analysis of hybrid video/written interactions in a video chat Camfrog, although the author herself condemns the overuse of the term 'hybridization', which is 'an escape route to bypass some theoretical and methodological problems' (pp. 46–47). The first part of the investigation relies on interviews with users to clarify the self-perception of mode-switching, while the second part is a conversation analytic study of the interactions. To enable such a study, Sindoni developed an innovative transcription system that is described in detail and would be of interest to scholars of multimodal interaction. One unconventional solution, for instance, is to use drawings instead of screenshots for ethical reasons. The chapter is followed by a large transcription appendix. The analysis zooms in on the questions of the mode used to initiate talk, whether users mode-switch, who initiates the switch and why the mode- switching occurs.

In Chapter 3, devoted to the study of blogs, Sindoni follows the slippery path that has brought forth controversial concepts such as 'netspeak' or 'textese' and posits the existence of a linguistic variety used in blogs, 'blogEng'. She sets out to describe its features based on corpus linguistic methodology: keywords, cluster analysis and lexical bundles. Mode- switching is rethought as resource-switching: a practice that involves a wider range of resources, but excludes more minute differences such as written verbal versus spoken verbal language (p. 144). The second data set of blogging interaction is annotated differently, enabling the study of various semiotic resources such as avatars, videoclips and photos. Here, Sindoni offers an interesting insight into the nature of tags which she defines as decontextualized textual cues, linguistic and non-linguistic at the same time.

The last data-based chapter deals with a corpus of comments to a very popular YouTube video 'Charlie bit me'. Corpus analysis leads the author to conclude that this online output is quite different from the blog corpus. To account for the specificities of the data, Sindoni posits a multimodal

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relevance maxim: comments need to be consistent with the main communicative focus of multimodal interaction and the most salient semiotic resource, the foreground video (p. 205). On the whole, the comments appear to fall into two functional macro-categories: oriented toward relevance and oriented toward deviation. To conclude, Sindoni ties these findings to the study of identity and self-presentation online and claims that creation of virtual identities verges on creation of alternatives of self through multiple semiotic and discursive stances.

The conclusion foregrounds adaptation as a recurrent theme that underlies all forms of intertextuality considered in the book (p. 214). On the Web, spoken-like and written- like modes may encompass other resources: gaze and proxemics in spontaneous video conversations, fonts and colours in written exchanges. This prompts the author to make the polemical claim that 'the changes we are witnessing are secondary in their impact and significance only to the invention of the technology of writing' (p. 218).

The author admits that the position of non-verbal language in linguistic studies is controversial, as everything not within the realm of verbal language has traditionally been held to be non-linguistic (p. 10). One might ask whether this view is justified, given that linguistic methods have been developed and honed for the analysis of verbal communication. Indeed, the corpus linguistic approach in this book focuses on verbal features, and multimodality is handled only through counting mode changes. Moreover, the lack of citations of linguistic literature on blogs and chat is conspicuous in practical chapters. However, Sindoni has illustrated well that close reading of the data in the conversation analytic tradition can be fruitful in multimodal studies.

On the whole, the book has several strong points. The comprehensive and insightful overview of the orality–literacy debate in the computer-mediated context recommends it to CMC scholars and students. The tabulated lists of features are especially handy as a concise reference source. The combination of qualitative and quantitative study and the different data sets provide for a varied perspective that fits well into the frame of the Routledge series. Detailed accounts of methodology, notably the multimodal transcription system, raise the book's relevance in the current CMC landscape that begins to recognize the necessity of extending the context of analysis beyond purely verbal. Although this book is not for CMC novices, it offers yet another facet to the study of online interaction and should catch the eye of linguists interested in multimodality.