



**JETE**

*Journal of Economics and Technology in Education*

*JETE*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2026, pp.130-136.

Print ISSN 3105-2711; Online ISSN: 3105-272X

Journal homepage: <https://www.jetejournal.com>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.64058/jete260112ryebt>



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## Reimagining Young Emergent Bilinguals Through Multimodal Literacies: A Review of *Multimodal Literacies in Young Emergent Bilinguals: Beyond Print-Centric Practices*

Xu Yani, Yang Jiabao, Chen Ying

**Abstract:** This article reviews the book *Multimodal Literacies in Young Emergent Bilinguals: Beyond Print-Centric Practices* (edited by Sally Brown and Ling Hao, 2022), which focuses on the integration of multimodal literacies and the literacy development of young emergent bilinguals (EBs). Through empirical studies and case analyses, the book demonstrates that multimodal literacies effectively promote EBs' bilingual development, cultural identity construction, meaning-making, and social participation across diverse linguistic and cultural settings. It addresses the marginalization of EBs in conventional educational systems and provides practical insights for teaching and research. While the book is highly accessible and insightful, it could be enhanced by a "Suggested Reading" section. Overall, this seminal work enriches the field of multimodal literacy and language education, serving as a valuable resource for teachers, researchers, and graduate students.

**Keywords:** Multimodal Literacies; Young Emergent Bilinguals; Literacy Development; Bilingual Education; Semiotic Resources; Out-of-School Contexts; Cultural Identity

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Received: 02 Dec 2025 / Revised: 18 Apr 2026 / Accepted: 24 Apr 2026 / Published online: 30 Apr 2026 / Print published: 30 May 2026.

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**标题:** 走向多模态: 早期双语者读写教育的新实践——评《超越纸本: 早期双语者的多模态读写》

**摘要:** 本文评述由 Sally Brown 与 Ling Hao 主编的《超越纸本: 早期双语者的多模态读写》(2022)。该书聚焦多模态素养与早期 emergent bilingual (EB) 儿童素养发展的融会议题, 通过实证研究与案例分析, 论证多模态素养能在多元语言文化环境中有效促进儿童双语发展、文化身份建构、意义建构与社会参与。该书回应了传统教育体系对 EB 儿童的边缘化问题, 并为教学与研究提供实践启示。全书可读性与学术性兼备, 若增设“推荐阅读”板块将更完善。总体而言, 该书是多模态素养与语言教育领域的重要成果, 适合教师、研究者与研究生参考。

**关键词:** 多模态素养; 早期双语学习者; 素养发展; 双语教育; 符号资源; 校外情境; 文化身份

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Multimodal literacies are concerned with “the multifaceted ways in which languages (art, drama, music, movement, written/oral, math) can be studied in school contexts” (Sanders & Albers 2010: 4). It has gleaned considerable attention worldwide in the new era that calls for “a much broader view of literacy than portrayed by traditional language-based approaches” (New London Group 1996: 60). This new

perspective of literacy will especially benefit the marginalized population (e.g., immigrants) who struggles hard in the school systems “restricted to formalized, monolingual, monocultural and rule-governed forms of language” (New London Group 1996: 61). This volume thus integrates the fields of multimodal literacy and young emergent bilinguals (EBs), aiming to expand our understanding of the sophisticated ways of making and representing meanings in diverse cultural and linguistic settings.

Subsequent to the general introduction, the following 23 chapters are concisely structured in four parts based on children’s age groups, focusing on preschool (Chapters 2-7), kindergarten (Chapters 8-10), primary grades (Chapters 11-19) and out-of-school contexts (Chapters 20-23) respectively.

Chapter 1 offers a glimpse of the field with a synthesis of literature concerning EB children’s multimodal literacy practices. Anchored in the social semiotic theory, sociocultural theory and translanguaging theory, it analyzes 30 qualified articles retrieved from 2000 to 2020. Evidences demonstrate that multimodal literacies are being widely used in various bilingual teaching and learning contexts, serving as good tools to promote EBs’ English literacy development, bilingual and home language development, and cultural identity shaping.

Part 1 (Chapter 2-7) revolves around preschool children’s multimodal literacy practices. Chapter 2 studies the multimodal literacies of a four-year-old boy during his play with a monolingual four-year-old girl. The research shows “play is a developmentally appropriate child-centered literacy” (p. 27), in which, children could make full use of multimodal resources (e.g., toys, furniture) around them to fluidly negotiate non-verbally and actively co-construct meanings. Chapter 3 features a four-year-old girl’s multilingual and multimodal literacy experience at home. Findings reveal in a supportive home environment, she could skillfully orchestrate multilingual (English and Chinese) and multimodal repertoires (e.g., spatial knowledge, body language) to achieve her communicative purposes and successfully develop her biliteracy in English and Chinese. Chapter 4 reports the multimodal narrative composition of two four-year-old boys. In their narration, they collaboratively engage in multimodal composition with deployment of movement, gestures, toys, etc., while in their sustained conversations, they tend to apply their funds of knowledge, lived experiences of their own and others, and their cultural identities in their robust interactions. Chapter 5 shares two literacy-as-events of young EBs from two longitudinal research projects. The research, from the perspectives of translanguaging and multimodality, highlights how young children navigate rich linguistic and multimodal resources flexibly in meaning-making to attain their goals in diverse linguistic and cultural settings. Chapter 6 foregrounds a multiple case study of pre-kindergarten bilinguals in their study of the 24 solar terms that are used to denote Chinese agricultural seasons and guide agricultural activities. It showcases their

multicultural, multilingual and multimodal approach of learning, in which, EBs participate in various literacy events, such as songs, experiential activities, etc. to boost their understanding and learning. Chapter 7 proposes an explicitly critical and multimodal pedagogy to challenge the monolithic and monolingual ideologies in the Brazilian education. It examines how semiotic modes are utilized in going-to-bed activities to expand preschoolers' funds of knowledge and experiences, which can support a "politically engaged, critically informed and socioculturally just education" (p. 88).

Part 2 (Chapter 8-10) exhibits kindergarteners' multimodal literacy practices. Chapter 8 illustrates multimodal storytelling activities in a bilingual kindergarten, in which orchestration of semiotic resources such as oral and written languages, drawing, material objects and movement is constructive for EBs to interpret and compose stories and thus advances their multiliteracies development. Chapter 9 describes two multimodal literacies activities - meaning-making activities in a bilingual text and joyful play in fairy tales. In both practices, students conduct multilingual and multimodal interactions with engagement of diverse resources (e.g., language, cultural, family and contextual resources). It is thus suggested that opportunities be offered to young EBs to engage in literacy multilingually and multimodally. Chapter 10 probes bilingual identity construction and development of dual-language kindergarteners. Guided by a three-phase multimodal approach, the authors portray the ways the young EBs understand bilingualism and express their bilingual identities through multimodal resources including portraits, literature, music, writing, drawing and discussion to negotiate and communicate meaning.

Part 3 (Chapter 11-19) is devoted to the EBs' multimodal literacies in primary schools. Chapter 11 introduces a multimodal social semiotics approach to analyze children's multiliteracies experiences. Two bilingual first-graders harness multimodal expressions and modes (e.g. project-based approaches, creative storytelling) in their learning, which informs us of their meaning-making processes, funds of knowledge and life experiences, etc. outside of school. It offers insights into incorporation of a multimodal approach in instruction for children' development in biliteracy and bilingualism. Chapter 12 foregrounds two seven-year-old bilinguals' multimodal learning experiences with a mobile storytelling app- StoryKit®, which is an exciting experience for children in terms of self-authoring, oral and digital retellings, playful learning and engagement in multimodal literacies. Multimodal and digital literacies prove to be valuable tools for social interaction, language development and literacy learning in homes and classrooms. Chapter 13 examines a multimodal approach to writing instruction. Teachers resort to diverse semiotic resources of embodiments, gestures, gaze, proximity, etc. to instruct young EBs in authoring picturebooks, which facilitates children's multimodal composing in designing,

drafting, revising and editing, etc. The author firmly recommends infusing multimodal work within reading and writing processes and workshops in view of the positive outcomes. Chapter 14 spotlights a STEERS Model (sponsors, tools, emotions, experiences, reflexivity and syncretism) for multimodal literacies development. It is illustrated with the experience of young bilingual learners with an online writing tool - wiki. The affordances of wiki increase their engagement with schooled literacy and have attained positive outcomes. Therefore the Model is proposed as a beneficial way to boost bilingual children's multimodal and digital literacy practices and address issues of social inequities. Chapter 15 delineates a case study on how three refugee children employ semiotic resources to make sense of themselves and their family stories in a family literacy project. Analysis reveals children position themselves in different ways through the stories in their multimodal drawings, which reflects their cultural knowledge, religious literacy practices and daily educational experiences in the multimodal artifacts. Chapter 16 calls attention to another special group of people - Black girls' multiliteracies practices in dual language bilingual education programs. The authors examine the language and literacy practices of two Black girls who demonstrate brilliance in their learning, braiding visual images, gestures, music and artifacts fluidly across languages and modes. It evidences translanguaging and multimodal modes are conducive to literacy development and identify construction. Chapter 17 concerns a specific sociocognitive skill - Theory of Mind (ToM). The authors stress the facilitative role of multimodal texts in fostering ToM and enhancing reading comprehension, and provide empirical evidence of ToM as a unique predictor of both oral and reading comprehension of EBs. Accordingly, explicit instruction of ToM in narratives is advocated for increasing students' reading comprehension. Chapter 18 presents an ethnographic case study on EBs' engagement in multimodal literacy practices. The fourth-graders' performances in a graphic memoir writing project promote young EBs' identity construction and language development. The authors thus call for a shift away from the linear, text-based approach to a multimodal, multicultural perspective of literacy. Chapter 19 explores the multimodal literacy practices of a young EB, who demonstrates herself as an active, thoughtful and reflective learner with skillful usage of human and non-human resources in several learning events (e.g., reading, Lego construction). The findings provide insights into the instruction of teachers for literacy development (e.g., use of learning stories).

Unlike the first three parts situated in in-school settings, Part 4 (Chapter 20-23) turns to out-of-school multiliteracies practices. Chapter 20 approaches the language learning of Chinese-Norwegian EB children using multimodal literacies at home across age and language dominance. Children have access to ample multiliteracies resources, and there are "robust connections between children's

language dominance and their multimodal literacy experience” and “a correlation between app use (i.e. watching videos and playing games) and children’s language dominance” (p. 269). Chapter 21 discusses the multimodal practices of two young EBs in learning Korean. Participants can strategically and flexibly make multimodal choices to understand YouTube videos, express themselves and make new meanings. The results have several positive educational and theoretical implications of multimodal learning activities. Chapter 22 centers on the multiliteracies learning of a Korean EB child and his family members in a science museum. EB family members engage each other with diverse semiotic resources, such as languages (Korean and English), scientific terms (e.g., gravity), gaze, pointing gestures and parallel environment (objects - text) to make sense of exhibits and to build meaning together. The book wraps up in Chapter 23, giving new avenues to use the findings presented within different chapters in terms of research and classroom practices.

To capulate, this edition contributes substantially to studies on literacies development of young EBs via rich semiotic repertoire. It merits applause in the following aspects. Firstly, the most significant contribution of this volume, as the book title indicates, is “the coupling of multimodal literacy and young emergent bilinguals” (p. xxi). In this digital word, more than ever before, attention has been given to multimodality, and new literacies (Sanders & Albers, 2010). Yet, students are still confined to “verbo-centric literacy curricula” (p. 64); the emergent multilingual children in particular, are following “monolingualism, monomodal print texts and white suburban ways of knowing as inviolable gold standards - labeling all else as inferior” (p. xx), who are deprived of full participation in classroom activities. Against this backdrop, this volume not only enriches our knowledge about multimodality and multimodal literacies, expands our understandings of the complicated literacy learning for young EBs across the world, but also speaks back to “an oppressive power dynamic that willfully misconstrues linguistic diversity as a pathology to be diagnosed and remediated” (p. xx).

Secondly, this volume is reader-friendly, especially for novice researchers. The opening chapter with a systematic literature review of research on multimodal literacies of young EBs serves as the springboard for early-career researchers to have a quick grasp of the field; then readers are provided with studies on a broad coverage of EBs in in-school settings and out-of-school settings, framed from a multiple perspectives of social semiotic theory, sociocultural theory, translanguaging theory, nexus theory, etc. Based on these findings, new directions in research and teaching are finally summarized in the closing chapter. The book not only familiarizes readers with the critical issues in this field, but also illuminates them to go on in clear directions.

Although the value of this edition is undeniable, had the editors included “Suggested Reading”, it would be more supportive to enrich the knowledge of interested readers. Taken as a whole, this book sheds light on the literacy development of young EBs through the lens of multimodality. This seminal book will serve a wide range of readership such as teachers, teacher leaders, literacy researchers and graduate students, etc. interested in the domains of multimodality, multimodal literacy and language education, etc.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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