

Book Review

Yongxiang Wang: *Waiyu Jiaoxue Ketang Huayu Duihuaxing Yanjiu*. Beijing: People's Press, 2014, pp. 285, Hardback and Paperback 48.00 RMB, ISBN: 978-7-01-013449-9.

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Over the past few years, the concept of MOOC (massive open online courses) has gained widespread popularity among a considerable number of educationists and educational institutes around the world. Its advent seems like an inevitable outcome of the superfast development of modern technology, especially that of the Internet. However, that is not in the least the only *raison d'être* of MOOC.

When this somewhat avant-garde concept was first proposed, those unsatisfied with the status quo of education, particularly higher education, deemed it the ultimate solution to many problems that have been ailing post-industrial educational systems around the world, the worst one of which is inequality. The alleged reason why MOOC has become a new favorite of some education reformists and especially those businesses that are expecting to profit from this nascent area now turns out to be a quite simple one. MOOC is believed to be a liberating force that can solve the problems of inequality. Be that as it may, MOOC is still not free of controversy. In fact, a larger number of people have never really stopped observing this educational frenzy with discretion and criticizing it with more sound theoretical and empirical evidence. In this respect, Yongxiang Wang's *Waiyu Jiaoxue Ketang Huayu Duihuaxing Yanjiu* ('A Study of the Dialogic Nature of the TEFL Classroom Discourse') proves to be a fine example.

It is not as much that this monograph deals with the problems of MOOC head-on than that it offers an indirect but quite effective take on MOOC. In fact, the book, written in Chinese, has a subtitle that adds to its persuasive appeal: the construction of the intersubjective discourse model in the Chinese TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) classroom. This work accentuates a key element that is missing in all contemporary MOOC practices: real-life embodied interactivity between various subjects involved in the pedagogical activities of TEFL in China. To that end, this book adopts a unique semiotic stance, that is, the Bakhtinian concept of dialogicity, in analyzing and even deconstructing the Chinese TEFL discourse (p. 9). Although Bakhtin himself was overtly critical of foreign language teaching activities and explicitly

denounced the lack of dialogicity in the TFL classroom, this book has somehow managed to create a seemingly sophisticated but quite dialectic possibility of discussing dialogicity in the TEFL discourse, based on the very concept of dialogicity proposed by Bakhtin (p. 11).

Based on substantial corpus analyses of convincing linguistic data collected from various credible classroom teaching activities and recorded materials of TEFL competitions (pp. 13–14), this book addresses seven most significant issues in the TEFL classroom, from the semiotic nature of TEFL to the possibility of decentralization in order to establish an intersubjective TEFL model (pp. 253–257). Wang has in effect made a rather compelling Bakhtinian critique of Bakhtin's own understanding of foreign language teaching and the TFL classroom discourse. A recurring theme in this book is that the ultimate purpose of any TEFL activity is to facilitate students' learning, which is not solely dependent on the teacher's imparting of knowledge. That has just ruled out such virtual agency as MOOC. What students' learning depends on is their construction, which can only take place in an intersubjective way. To that end in TEFL, real-life interactions of all sorts are encouraged and fulfilled, including teacher-student interactions, student-student interactions, and quasi-interactive processes in textbook reading and cooperative explorations of study materials (p. 258).

In general, despite the fact that it is not published in English, which obviously limits the scope of its readership, this book has made a successful attempt to fill vacancies in the application of the Bakhtinian view of dialogicity and the study of the institutional discourse of TEFL. As promised in the introductory part of this book, it has indeed brought in a new perspective of somehow localized Bakhtinian studies, as well as novel theoretical resources and approaches to the Chinese TEFL discourse.