

Remaking meaning: Talk, text and resemiosis in Vietnamese EMI mathematics classrooms

In this paper, I adopt a microanalytic perspective to examine a) the semiotic demands placed on early-year Vietnamese high school students by EMI mathematics lessons and b) the implications for instructional design in foreign language settings. Whether labelled as content-based instruction (CBI), content and language integrated learning (CLIL) or English as medium of instruction (EMI), an a-theoretical form of immersion education, educators in these dual-purpose settings have struggled to balance attention to language with attention to instructional 'content' i.e. history, biology, geometry. Well-documented challenges arising from institutional and school-level organizational structures, including differences in curriculum and disciplinary practices, in professional knowledge bases and in patterns in school-level collaboration, are evident across instructional contexts. However, less attention has been given to the multisemiotic nature of EMI classrooms and the additional demands that resource-rich environments place on teachers and learners.

Using theories of social semiotics (Halliday, 1978; Kress, 2010) and associated grammars (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996/2006), I focus on learners' notetaking and the transformation of mathematics instruction, including graphs, illustrations and mathematical notations, into personal accounts of meaning. Data is drawn from a larger research project that explores the implementation of government-mandated EMI in Vietnamese high school science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) classrooms; the data set includes samples of student writing, notes from classrooms observation, audio recordings of classroom interaction, still photos, instructional materials and interviews with the teacher and students. Comparison of students' notebooks provides clear evidence of the complexity of synthesizing multisemiotic texts to create an account of mathematical practices. Notably, students who initially attempted to copy or transcribe slides and/or boardwork took fewer notes than those who synthesized information that was communicated orally, in writing, in images and in mathematical notation. Implications address the need for a metalanguage for multisemiotic texts, for explicit instruction in multisemiotic text production and for corresponding development of language educator's knowledge base.