



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

System

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/system](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/system)

# Multimodal composing as a learning activity in English classrooms: Inquiring into the sources of its motivational capacity

Lianjiang Jiang<sup>a, b, \*</sup>, Jasmine Luk<sup>b</sup><sup>a</sup> School of Foreign Languages, Jimei University, Xiamen, People's Republic of China<sup>b</sup> Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam, Hong Kong

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 14 January 2015

Received in revised form 25 March 2016

Accepted 2 April 2016

Available online 12 April 2016

### Keywords:

Multimodal composing

Motivational capacity

Sources

English

## ABSTRACT

Although multimodal composing (MC) has received growing attention in the field of language education as a textual and literacy practice with significant potential to make learning engaging and motivating, the sources of its motivational capacity as an activity for English learning remain largely unexplored in empirical studies. This paper reports on a study that investigated the experiences and perceptions of 21 students and 5 teachers who participated in a year-long research that engaged students with multimodal composing of video essays in an undergraduate English curriculum in China. Data for this paper were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews and written reflections to examine learners' and teachers' perspectives on what makes English learning with MC engaging and motivating. The findings reveal that the motivational capacity of MC derives from seven factors that students experienced during the MC process: challenge, curiosity, control, fantasy, competition, cooperation, and recognition. These findings are helpful in informing our understanding of the motivating features of using multimodal text construction as a learning activity in the language classrooms. They also offer implications on how MC can be used to construct a motivating learning environment for contemporary English learners.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Recent developments in digital technologies have transformed the practices of language and communication, facilitating the creation of digital texts through multimodal composing (MC), which combines words, images, sound and other modes, defined as “socially and culturally shaped resources for making meaning” (Bezemer & Kress, 2008, p. 117). Given the omnipresence of digital tools in the 21st century language classrooms and the increasing popularity of MC in English language learners' everyday life in recent years, there is growing interest on the part of researchers in the pedagogic use of various forms of MC (e.g., video production, audio podcasting) for learning in different educational settings, including urban public schools with linguistically diverse English language learners in the U.S. (Hull & Nelson, 2005; Smythe & Neufeld, 2010), a secondary school in Kenya (Kendrick, Early, & Chemjor, 2013), and mainstream university ESL/EFL courses in Hong Kong (Hafner, 2014) and Taiwan (Lee, 2014; Yang, 2012). The findings of these studies show that MC can be “validly and

\* Corresponding author. School of Foreign Languages, Jimei University, Xiamen, 361021, People's Republic of China.

E-mail address: [jianglj@connect.hku.hk](mailto:jianglj@connect.hku.hk) (L. Jiang).

productively used as an English language learning activity” and among many other benefits, embedding MC projects (e.g., digital video) into the language curriculum can be “highly motivational” (Hafner, 2015, pp. 487–488). While there is no lack of literature indicating that many language learners are motivated to use MC for learning, there is yet little research on what it is that makes English learning with MC so motivating and engaging. To help teachers to enhance their pedagogic use of MC for motivated learning behavior, we need to have a more thorough understanding of the sources of the motivational capacity of MC. Moreover, as MC is increasingly used in language education as a bridge between youth’s outside-school literacy practice and in-school learning, research on the sources of its motivational capacity can contribute to the knowledge about the motivational aspects of youth’s engagement with multimodal text construction in formal educational settings.

This article examines the implementation of a digital multimodal composing program in an undergraduate EFL course at a mainstream university in China. With reference to the lived experiences and perceptions of five teachers and 21 students who used MC as part of their classroom learning, we attempt to uncover the sources of the motivational capacity of MC and explore why learners and teachers would find MC motivating, with the hope of providing insights into how MC can help to engage students in language learning in digital era. In the following sections, studies on the motivational aspects of MC for language learning are first reviewed, followed by an illustration of the theoretical framework that informed the inquiry. Then, we present the research methods used to gather data about students’ and teachers’ experiences before reporting their explanations for the motivational capacity of MC for English learning.

## 2. Motivational aspects of multimodal composing for language learning

The notion of multimodal composing was first proposed by a number of scholars working in the field of New Literacy Studies as an approach to enact a pedagogy of multiliteracies in schools to prepare students for the changing nature of representation, the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity, and the plurality of textual practices associated with digital technologies (New London Group, 1996). The past two decades have witnessed a broadened literature on using MC in language classrooms, suggesting that MC could promote several aspects of language learning such as vocabulary knowledge, critical literacy and identity presentation (e.g., Ajayi, 2009; Hafner, 2014; Pirkhai-Illich, 2010). However, research on the motivational aspects of MC remains limited. Jacobs (2013) critiques that although “research on youth literacy practices often implies a relationship between engagement in multiliteracies and motivation”, “little empirical evidence supports a clear link” (p. 271). Jacobs (2013) further explains that the reason for the paucity of research on the motivational aspects of multiliteracies/multimodal practices is that “the two areas of study come from different theoretical and epistemological standpoints” (p. 272). She writes:

... research into the new literacies and multiliteracies is typically phenomenological and qualitative and conducted by scholars working from a sociocultural perspective who often gather data outside school settings ... studies of motivation, conversely, are typically conducted in schools, come out of psychology and educational psychology, are quantitative ... [with] the focus on reading rather than on text production. (Jacobs, 2013, p. 272)

These differences, according to Jacobs (2013), have given rise to a “dichotomy of multiliteracies/new literacies research and motivation research”, resulting in scanty knowledge concerning the motivational aspects of using MC for student learning in schools (p. 272). This dichotomy, however, has been addressed in the field of second/foreign language education by two notable studies that integrate studies of the multimodal/new literacies with work on motivation. One study, conducted by Yang and Wu (2012) with high school students in Taiwan, reported that after producing multimodal digital stories, students felt more motivated to learn English because they found classroom tasks more interesting and helpful, and they could perform better, leading to enhanced feelings of task value and self efficacy. Another study by Hafner and Miller (2011), using qualitative methods, reported on the positive role of a 7-week video production project in fostering language learning autonomy (i.e., becoming self-regulated) and motivation among English learners at an English-medium university in Hong Kong. These two studies suggest that MC can be motivational and they offer an empirical base for the present study, though a systemic examination of the sources of the motivational capacity of MC for English learning is still lacking. While studies (e.g., Dornyei, 2000; Ushioda, 2005; Warschauer, 1996) indicate that motivation is multifaceted, and various factors may motivate students to engage in language learning, what Yang and Wu (2012) and Hafner and Miller (2011) revealed in their studies may be a partial picture of the motivational aspects of MC. In addition, neither studies conducted in-depth individual interviews, indicating that an emic approach (Lett, 1990) to exploring why MC may be motivating is still needed.

## 3. Theoretical framework: a taxonomy of motivating factors

In second/foreign language education, research on motivation has mainly focused on examining student motivation in traditional learning environments (e.g., Dornyei, 2000; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Norton, 1995). With respect to technology-supported multimodal learning environments, however, research focusing on learners’ motivation is limited. As multimodal composing of digital texts is a technology-mediated activity, investigation into the motivational aspects of using MC as a learning activity requires a theory that considers the role of technology. To inquire into the sources of the motivational capacity of MC, this study draws on Malone and Lepper’s (1987) motivation theory, which proposes a taxonomy of factors that makes learning motivating. Though the theory was developed in nearly three decades ago, it remains a systemic account of motivation with respect to technology-supported learning activities. Based on their extensive empirical research on what

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/372955>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/372955>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)