Reviews

The Psychology of Language: A Critical Introduction. Michael A. Forrester. London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1996. 216 pp.

Reviewed by
Amy D. Yamashiro
Saitama Junior College

Have you ever bypassed reading a psycholinguistics book because the text looked incomprehensible, uninteresting, and/or irrelevant to real life? If you have, *The Psychology of Language: A Critical Introduction* may change your mind and offer a new perspective on the field. Michael A. Forrester breathes fresh life into the discipline by taking a critical stance on "accepted" theories and models of language. Forrester fearlessly goes beyond the existing boundaries of psycholinguistics research to include analyses of computer-generated media and interactive documents and, in doing so, opens the door to postmodern analysis of text construction and interpretation. He introduces "discursive social psychology," a term coined by combining discourse analysis and social psychology (p. 184). By arguing that modern views and beliefs in generalizable laws and principles must be amended to recognize the importance of reflexive critical inquiry, Forrester suggests that the notion of the neutral and objective scientific researcher and the positivistic ideals of scientific truth are no longer defensible. The shift to a focus on the interconnection between discourse analysis and social psychology, he argues, means that language researchers should examine language as social action. "Discursive" social psychology may help connect psycholinguistic research with future research examining the relationship between language and communication processes.

After providing a historical overview of psycholinguistics, Forrester examines language in relation to four distinct psychological approaches: cognitive psychology, neuropsychology, social psychology, and "discursive" social psychology. He begins by explaining that cognitive psychology can provide insights through which to critique the prevailing theories of language such as Chomsky's transformative generative grammar and communicative competence. When Forrester discusses semantics, he focuses on the philosophical underpinnings of semantics, and ends his discussion with speech act theory and pragmatics.

In a seamless fashion, Forrester covers spoken language, moving from deixis to conversational analysis and power relations within social

interaction. He delves into written language, starting with sign-systems and social semiotics, and examines the reader's role in text interpretation before discussing text construction. With respect to writing research, he includes computer applications, such as "hypertext" and "hypermedia," which challenge the traditional boundaries of the author-reader relationship.

Forrester provides a coherent framework which not only links the themes of thinking (cognition), talk (spoken discourse), and text (written discourse), but also revives the field of psycholinguistics by establishing its relevance to daily life. His comprehensive synthesis of the discipline, critical review of the existing literature, and suggestions for future psycholinguistic research are invaluable. However, his single greatest contribution may be his ability to balance dense scholarship for the expert with much needed accessibility for the novice. So if you have thus far avoided reading in this field, I would highly recommend *The Psychology of Language: A Critical Introduction* as the most readable, current, and up-to-date introductory text on psycholinguistics available. Forrester truly provides a "critical" introduction to the psychology of language.

Teachers' Voices 3: Teaching Critical Literacy. Anne Burns and Susan Hood, Editors. Sydney, Australia: Macquarie University, 1998. 68 pp.

Reviewed by
Caroline Bertorelli

Teachers' Voices 3 is the third volume in the Teachers' Voices series presenting teachers' personal experiences of classroom-based action research. The research documented was from a special project undertaken through the National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research (NCELTR) at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia. The format of this third volume differs from the previous volumes in that the research and suggestions for classroom application are now in separate sections.

This text, as the title suggests, focuses on the problem of how to teach critical literacy. It is divided into two sections. Section one consists of papers by the editors on the theory behind action research and critical literacy. Section two provides accounts from the six participating Adult Migrant Program English teachers and is organized according to the level of the English classes, from beginner to advanced.

The purpose of action research is for teachers to solve a specific problem in the classroom (Nunan, 1992) or to improve their teaching and facilitate learning by addressing problems through a systematic approach (Hadley, 1997). In the opening paper of section one, Anne Burns focuses on the importance of doing action research not only for professional development and personal growth, but also for networking and collaborating with other teachers. She describes how to carry this out in the present work and, incidentally, has just published a book with Cambridge University Press entitled *Collaborative Action Research for English Language Teachers*. The next paper, by Susan Hood, examines the meaning of critical literacy and its position in the context of other reading strategies such as schema theory.

Critical literacy is either the main feature or part of the class goal in each of the projects described in *Teachers' Voices 3*. Topics include reading fables, newspaper articles or other texts relating to cultural and social issues about Australia. Activities include identifying the speaker or writer, questioning the content, and identifying the audience. Each research project conforms to a standardized format: the research framework is stated first, followed by the activities performed, reflections on their research by the teachers, and discussion tasks and classroom tasks for the reader.

The text includes a wide selection of material and sample worksheets for developing learners' critical skills, and these can be easily adapted. The most interesting part of the research is the teachers' own reflections and suggestions for further research. These are very insightful and useful for teachers involved in teaching critical literacy, and are also applicable to teachers reviewing their own teaching in general.

This book is an invaluable text for any teacher involved in teaching critical literacy, whether as the main theme or as an element of a course. The question, "What is critical literacy?" as well as how to teach it is thoroughly explored without being prescriptive. The projects are clearly written, and the fixed format used for describing the projects makes the book readily accessible.

References

Hadley, G. (1997). Action research: Something for everyone. In D. T. Griffee & D. Nunan (Eds.). *Classroom teachers and classroom research*. (pp. 87-98) Tokyo: JALT Applied Materials.

Nunan, D. (1992). *Research methods in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms. Jack C. Richards
and Charles Lockhart. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
xii + 218 pp.

Reviewed by
Brenda Dyer
Tokyo Women's Christian University

Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms, one volume in
the Cambridge Language Education series, is designed for use in pre-
service and in-service teacher education programs. It introduces tools of
reflection, self-inquiry, and self-evaluation as a means of professional
development and thus reflects the recent trend in education of teacher-
initiated, bottom-up views of the teaching process, rather than the more
traditional methods and top-down approach. As the authors say, the
book does not intend "to tell teachers what effective teaching is, but
rather tries to develop a critically reflective approach to teaching, which
can be used with any teaching method" (p. 3). Teachers are led to
collect data about their own teaching; to examine their attitudes, beliefs,
and assumptions; and then to use the information as a basis for both
theorizing about teaching and improving their own professional prac-
tice. This is an empowering and creative approach to teacher training
and one that could support a lifetime of career development.

The book's main merit is in its adaptability and scope. It claims from the
outset to be focused on practice, rather than theory, encouraging teachers
to construct their own theories of teaching, based on their own experi-
ence. However, the fact that the book itself is based on the theory of
reflective professional practice means that it is widely applicable to teach-
ers of all levels of experience, background, and methodology. The presen-
tation of core issues in teacher development is quite elegantly accomplished
through each chapter's brief review of research on teaching processes,
quotes from learners and teachers, and transcripts from classroom interac-
tion, followed by discussion questions that demand that teachers reflect on
their own beliefs about and/or experience with the chapter's central issue.
Suggested tasks at the end of each chapter include peer observation, self-
evaluation, and action research. As each chapter leads teachers deeper
into their own processes, the self-reflective approach is internalized. If
teachers observe their own teaching as sensitively and intelligently as the
book recommends, they will surely develop life-long reflective habits that
will continue to enhance professional self-awareness, knowledge, and skill.
One of the five assumptions about teacher development listed in the intro-
duction is, "Experience is insufficient as a basis for development" (p. 4).
Although personal experience is the foundation of the procedures pre-

sented in this book, the authors stress that only by critical evaluation of experience do change and development occur. The process of reflecting upon one's own teaching is an essential element in constructing theories of teaching, and at its basis is a series of provocative questions that inform each chapter, such as:

What are my beliefs about teaching and where do they come from?

What kind of planning decisions do I use?

What form do my lessons have?

What kinds of interactions occur in my classroom?

Through reflecting on questions like these, teachers evaluate their teaching, pinpoint areas needing change, posit strategies for change, and observe the effects of these strategies.

The book is less linear and more process-oriented than many teacher-training manuals, yet includes practical exercises such as discussion questions and chapter-end tasks. The exercises that form the basis of each chapter have been class-tested by the authors in various countries including the U.S., Brazil, Hong Kong, and Japan. The chapters, with the exception of Chapter 1, could be used in any order, depending on whether the book is used with pre-service or in-service teachers. Chapter 1 provides an essential introduction to classroom investigative procedures such as journals, lesson reports, questionnaires, audio and video recordings, observation, and action research. It is one of the best chapters of the book since it is concise, clear, supported by quotes from teachers, and concluding with excellent discussion questions. At the end of every chapter appear several appendices. In chapter 1 these include reflective questions to guide journal entries, guidelines for personal observation, and guidelines for conducting action research. Chapter 3 ("Focus on the Learner") is also excellent. Written around the idea that, "while learning is the goal of teaching, it is not necessarily the mirror image of teaching" (p. 52), it suggests ways to explore learners' beliefs about teaching and learning. The exploratory action research section on learning styles and strategies also looks useful.

The main criticism of the book is that it doesn't acknowledge fully enough its debts to the long theoretical tradition of reflective teacher practice, nor does it develop the more sociopolitical, post-modern questions the reflective approach begs. Though mention is made of applications of theories of reflective practice to the field of second language teaching, it seems that the theoretical foundation should be laid out more in the introduction, in summary, at least. There has been a long and continuous interest in reflection in teacher education since the time of John Dewey. However, the real

theorist of reflective inquiry is Donald Schon (1983), who presented his methods of exploring professional knowledge, first to engineers, architects, town planners, and psychologists and later to teachers. Mayher's (1990) "uncommon sense" view of education describes teachers who improvise, frame problems in new ways, and engage in hypothesis testing as they reflect on practice. Britton (1987) suggests that "every lesson should be for the teacher an inquiry, some further discovery, a quiet form of research, and that time to reflect, draw inferences, and plan further inquiry is also essential" (p. 15). More acknowledgement of the historical and current interests in reflective professional practice would lend validity to the questions and exercises in each chapter, which some teachers, particularly those from non-Western cultures, might find overly personal, "touchy-feely," or even irrelevant. To cultures in which education means the dispensation of information from teacher/text, this learner-centered, exploratory, process approach might appear ridiculous. Even a basic tool of reflective practice, peer observation, could potentially be a significant psychological barrier for someone from a culture where classroom observation has been associated with prescription, criticism, and control. With a more persuasive introduction which outlines the history of reflective practice and defends its application to second language teaching, new and experienced teachers, especially those from non-Western cultures, may be more enthusiastic about diving into the probing personal work that follows.

Paulo Freire and the research his work has inspired are also sadly absent from the book in both name and sentiment. He was one of the seminal teacher-researchers endorsing this self-reflective, experimental approach to teaching. His ideas of "praxis" and "problem-posing" are basic to the theories of reflective professional practice. Further, the searching sociopolitical questions that follow from his approach are missing. Surely a textbook on reflective second language teacher training should invite questions of power from multicultural, cross-cultural, ethnic, and gendered points of view. In order to search for principles that underlie our teaching, for the reasons that are the basis of our theory of teaching, we need to uncover the inconsistencies and contradictions in what we do in the classroom. Such questions as: "Who has the power in my classroom?" "How does what I do benefit the students?" and "Whose interests are being served?" are crucial ones in uncovering the subtle and unconscious ways we disempower students on the basis of race and gender. Chapter 2 ("Exploring Teachers' Beliefs") would be the natural arena for this type of exploration, but it fails to include questions about teachers' assumptions about race, culture, or gender. Similarly, Chapter 5 ("The Role of the Teacher"), though basically good, lacks

more probing reflection on how power is constituted in the foreign language classroom. The short section on "Cultural Dimensions of Roles" is not enough.

Despite these shortcomings, *Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms* would serve as an excellent core text in teacher education programs. Such texts are often either too theoretical or err on the side of practicality, descending to the "ESL bag of tricks" level with an approach to teaching as a skilled trade, rather than a profession. Richards and Lockhart's approach suffers from neither of these common weaknesses. It succeeds in giving teachers numerous practical applications while retaining a reflective, theoretical basis and provides the building blocks of an intelligent, flexible, professional practice.

References

Britton, J. (1987). A quiet form of research. In D. Goswami & P. Stillman (Eds.), *Reclaiming the classroom* (pp. 13-19). Upper Montclair, NJ: Heinemann.

Mayher, J. S. (1990). *Uncommon sense: Theoretical practice in language education*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Schon, D. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.

Text-based Syllabus Design. Susan Feez. Sydney, Australia: National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research, 1998. 144 pp.

Reviewed by
Roberta Golliher
Miyazaki International College

Text-based Syllabus Design is not a book about designing a language course around a mandated text. Rather, it is about designing and implementing courses that enable "learners to develop the knowledge and skills which will allow them to engage with whole texts (spoken or written) appropriate to social contexts" (p. v). This text-based approach, Feez informs us, has evolved during the past twenty-odd years as Australian language educators have come increasingly to focus on students' developing discourse skills.

Feez includes a background chapter as well as chapters on text-based syllabus implementation, analysis of student needs and monitoring of progress, course design, and unit and lesson planning. The chapters' pre-reading questions and reflection tasks are geared to teachers who are reading the book for their own professional development or

who are involved in in-service training. In such contexts, the first chapter's theoretical background of the text-based syllabus would be especially useful, as the chapter compares the text-based syllabus with more familiar syllabi: structural, situational, topic-based, functional-notional, process (negotiated), task-based, and mixed. Feez explains how elements of each might find their way into a text-based syllabus.

Besides teachers seeking further training, another audience for the book would be educators interested in English language teaching in Australia. *Text-based Syllabus Design* contains numerous examples drawn from the Certificates in Spoken and Written English (CSWE), Australia's "most widely used adult TESOL curriculum framework" (p. 9). The CSWE requires students at each level to learn about at least one text type from each of the following families: exchanges, forms, procedures, information texts, story texts, and persuasive texts. As students progress to higher levels, they cycle back through text families and reencounter familiar text types in more complex forms.

Teachers evaluate students according to CSWE criteria and decide whether students advance through the curriculum. In addition, teachers pass information about students along to a nationwide database that is kept as part of Australia's Adult Migrant Education Program. Clearly, the CSWE curriculum provides a rich context for text-based syllabus design, as Feez explains quite well.

The main drawback of *Text-based Syllabus Design* is that while the examples from the CSWE are certainly useful, they are not thoroughly fleshed out. Feez could have written more about real teachers attempting to implement real text-based syllabi that conform to the CSWE curriculum. For example, what happens when teachers attempt to evaluate students according to CSWE criteria? For that matter, what, if any, problems have arisen from keeping a nationwide database on immigrants? Of course, the publication of *Text-based Syllabus Design* can initiate this critical discourse, as the book provides much of the necessary background to it.

Text-based Syllabus Design also provides readers with well laid out figures and tables. Logically minded course and curriculum planners will love the book's various diagrams, charts, and checklists. These features may not, however, immediately appeal to creative course designers, those who prefer, for example, the narrative, real-world, messy look and feel of Kathleen Graves's (1996) *Teachers as Course Developers*. So a paradoxical aspect of the book is that, though innovative in theory, it is not so innovative in style. Even right-brainers, though, should be able to see past style issues to the truly insightful and creative concepts in this book. Educators in Japan and elsewhere would do well to keep an eye on their Australian counterparts.

Reference

Graves, K. (1996). *Teachers as course developers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The Neurobiology of Affect in Language. John H. Schumann. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997. 341 pp.

<div align="right">

Reviewed by
Jenifer Hermes
University of Washington

</div>

Any teacher who has ever wondered, "What's going on with this student?" will find *The Neurobiology of Affect in Language* to be a fascinating departure point in the search for an answer. The title and introductory sections of this book are dauntingly technical and may put off the casual reader. This would be unfortunate for Schumann has written an accessible and persuasive account of the relationship between the inner working of our students' brains and their language learning behavior.

Adult language learners' efforts are, as teachers know, not uniformly successful. What can account for this variability in learner achievement? Schumann points out that emotional, or affective, factors underlie all cognition and that the language learning process is no exception. Attitude and motivation have long been seen to be intrinsically connected with language achievement. Schumann reports that while studying the relationship between acculturation and second language learning he became interested in the neurobiological and cognitive underpinnings of social and/or psychological processes. He began to study neuroanatomy, intent on "discovering whether there was some mechanism in the brain that allowed emotion to influence (or perhaps even control) cognition" (p. xix).

This brief introduction to the genesis of the text illustrates one of the book's principal strengths: the author's enthusiasm for the topic and his wide-ranging curiosity. While many educators may wonder what is happening inside learners' brains, few of us would set out to discover the neuroanatomical explanation. This, however, is precisely what Schumann has done for us. This book provides evidence for connections between learners' psychology and neurobiology and the variation in their language learning paths. This connection resides in a system called "stimulus appraisal." All organisms, language students included, assign value to stimuli based on criteria "such as whether [the stimuli] are novel, pleasant, enhancing of one's goals or needs, compatible with one's cop-

ing mechanisms, and supportive of one's self and social image" (p. 2). The individual's life experiences and history of preferences play a vital role in this system as well. Autobiographical diary sketches are one method by which language learners' experiences and histories can be explored.

Because each learner has a unique life history, and because second language acquisition is a time-consuming process, Schumann tells us that, "each individual's affective trajectory in SLA is unique" (p. xx). This book is based on hard science, but the theory that it outlines serves to underscore the importance of the individual.

The first two chapters, "The Theory" and "The Neural Mechanism," are tough reading for nonscientists, but they are carefully written and rewarding. The subsequent chapters provide data in the form of questionnaires and diary studies and are fascinating to read. Chapter 5, "Implications," in which the author links the theory to classroom language teaching practice, is an excellent example of how a complex theory can be linked to practical issues of interest to every teacher.

Schumann points out that teachers have their own appraisal systems and suggests that productive research could be carried out using student appraisals to discover, "how some teachers are able to achieve maximum congruence between their appraisals of how language should be taught and their students' appraisals of how language should be learned . . . [s]uch research may reveal how good teachers work productively with their students' varying stimulus-appraisal systems" (pp. 187-188).

The Neurobiology of Affect in Language is very successful in explaining a complex theory in clear language, and also in outlining the relevance of the theory to daily classroom practice. Teachers who read this book will learn much about what is happening inside their students' heads and also about how this affects attitudes and behavior.