

Reviews

The Handbook of Bilingualism. Tej K. Bhatia & William C. Ritchie (Eds.). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. 884 pp.

Reviewed by
Debra L. Simms

The Handbook of Bilingualism is one of the latest offerings in Blackwell Publishing's well-received series in linguistics. At 884 pages, it represents a significant investment of time. The editors, Tej K. Bhatia and William C. Ritchie of Syracuse University, have compiled what is likely the most comprehensive treatment of bilingualism available in a single volume. There are 31 well-written and thoroughly referenced chapters, each one authored by an internationally recognized researcher. The chapters are organized under four broad subject areas: Overview and Foundations, Neurological and Psychological Aspects, Societal Bilingualism and its Effects, and Global Perspectives and Challenges.

The shortest of the four sections, "Overview and Foundations," introduces basic concepts in the study of bilingualism. Distinctions are made, for example, between additive and subtractive bilingualism and between primary and secondary bilingualism. Readers are also introduced to the idea of monolingual bias, wherein monolingualism is seen as the norm while bilingualism is seen as aberrant. Newcomers to the study of bilingualism will find these introductory chapters engaging and informative.

Whereas the "Overview and Foundations" section is appropriate for the general reader, the same cannot be said for "Neurological and Psychological Aspects." This section deals with bilingual brain function, the idea of innate grammatical knowledge, the interaction between two grammatical systems, the roles of memory and emotion, and the complexities of code-switching. Brain science aficionados and die-hard grammar lovers will thoroughly enjoy getting up to speed on the most recent thinking in what many consider to be "hardcore" linguistics. Casual readers, on the other hand, may possibly be intimidated by or uninterested in this subject matter.

The remaining two sections, "Societal Bilingualism and its Effects," and "Global Perspectives and Challenges," take the study of bilingualism away from mathematical formulas and medical models and place it in the context of the social world. The social and political dimensions of bilingualism are explored here from a wide variety of perspectives including gender, race, class, and culture. And while bilingualism which includes English does predominate, there are also enlightening articles that deal with languages other than English. Ad Backus, for example, describes what has been happening to Turkish as it makes contact with German, French, and Danish via immigration, while Bhatia and Ritchie skillfully demystify the Hindi-Hindustani-Urdu-Punjabi core/axis in multilingual India.

Choosing which articles should go into a project like this is no easy task. Given that *The Handbook of Bilingualism* already weighs over 1 kilogram, it is perhaps unfair to suggest that something has been left out. Nevertheless, one might hope to find at least one chapter entirely devoted to the arguments around the global spread of English and the controversial idea of linguistic imperialism. Linguistic imperialism does get minimal attention from Bhatia and Ritchie in "Bilingualism in the Global Media and Advertising" and more substantial treatment in "Bi-/Multiculturalism in Southern Africa" by Nkonko M. Kamwangamalu. Nancy Dorian provides an excellent long-range view of language change in "Minority and Endangered Languages." Still, an article that deals directly and specifically with the social and political ramifications of the unprecedented spread of English from the perspective of an expert on bilingualism would have been most welcome.

Overall, *The Handbook of Bilingualism* is an excellent compilation by able scholars and a fine addition to Blackwell's series.

Teaching Listening in the Language Classroom. Christine C.M. Goh. Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre, RELC Portfolio Series 4, 2002. iii+55 pp.

Reviewed by

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Teaching Listening in the Language Classroom is one of the latest additions to the RELC Portfolio Series, designed as “practical resource booklets” (p. i) for language teachers. As the term “booklet” implies, this is a small, thin publication running to only 55 pages. Its stated aim is to “provide background and theoretical information about listening, and offer suggestions for planning listening tasks and lessons” (p. iii). The author, Christine Goh, certainly achieves this, though at a cost.

The layout of the book is simple and clear. There are five chapters, each with a short overview in which the main points of the chapter are highlighted, and each with a single-paragraph conclusion. In between, the main points are treated simply and systematically. Each chapter finds space for several “Tasks” which encourage the reader to reflect on issues raised in the book and relate them to the classroom. The book concludes with a page of references and three useful appendices.

Chapter 1 is a six-page theoretical introduction to the topic. Necessarily brief, Goh nevertheless manages to give readers an informative and fairly wide-ranging survey of such factors as purposeful listening, cognitive models of listening comprehension, bottom-up and top-down processing, and listening strategies. The references provided are useful gateways to exploring these areas in detail greater than this book permits.

Chapters 2 and 3 are the heart of the book. We are given short descriptions of about fifteen language tasks as well as sample procedures for these tasks, summaries of listening responses, ideas for pre- and postlistening activities and, most usefully, four lesson outlines. These outlines help make sense of the ideas raised in the first three chapters and are excellent templates for readers to use when lesson planning.

Chapter 4 encourages teachers to raise their students’ metacognitive awareness and suggests several ways of doing this, including keeping a listening diary. In this reviewer’s opinion, Chapter 5, on authentic listening materials, is the weakest. The ideas presented—such as “[you

should] screen songs for inappropriate language and unsuitable content” (p.44)—are not particularly interesting nor new. The book would have been better served with Chapter 5 removed and extra space given over to earlier chapters.

Throughout *Teaching Listening* Goh writes well and efficiently, but some serious weaknesses must be mentioned. First, much of the information is presented as a series of lists (five categories of..., ten types of...), and the descriptions of some points are so short as to be bare summaries. The result is an absence of clarifying examples. Thus we are told that “the concepts of bottom-up and top-down listening and the interactive nature of these processes are crucial to an understanding of how language learners listen” (p. 7), but no example is given of bottom-up and top-down processing at work. Then, in Task 1.3 (p. 7), we are asked to consider the difference between bottom-up and top-down processing and think of cases where one would take precedence over the other. This is very difficult for anyone for whom these abstract terms have no concrete application.

This point leads to my second criticism. Generally speaking, the tasks are appropriate, stimulating, and of great practical benefit. Task 2.4, for example, asks teachers to adapt one-way listening tasks so that they become two-way tasks—that is, those where students are interacting in pairs or small groups rather than listening to a recording or a teacher (p. 24). This is a very instructive activity, but the problem is that Goh does not provide any suggestions of her own to confirm, guide, or redirect our ideas. This can be quite unmotivating, and given that *Teaching Listening* is not a textbook (readers, that is, will probably be left to their own devices) and that it is designed to be “practical and technique oriented” (p. i), this seems a serious flaw.

Finally, the lack of a glossary means that terms such as “co-text” (p. 6) and “micro-markers” (p. 8) remain unexplained. Readers are unable to guess the meaning of new terms from context for the reasons mentioned above.

Teaching Listening is a stimulating book, and I applaud Goh for achieving so much in so few pages. Had the limited space been more thoughtfully allocated, thereby adding to the book’s accessibility and usefulness, my recommendation would have been unreserved.

Managing Vocabulary Learning. Paul Nation. Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre, RELC Portfolio Series 2, 2002. iii + 57 pp.

Reviewed by

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This title is one in a series of booklets designed for ESL/EFL teachers as short practical resources to aid teaching. The booklets have these main characteristics: "They are practical and technique-oriented; they are written in an accessible, nonacademic style; they focus on both principles and procedures" (p. i). The rationale behind *Managing Vocabulary Learning* is based on current research in second language pedagogy, and with this in mind, the author aims to cover those vocabulary topics that best provide teachers with "the basis for an understanding of the major principles lying behind an effective vocabulary program" (p. iii).

This booklet is divided into seven chapters, each with a set of tasks for the teacher to complete. The tasks are included to increase understanding of the main elements of each chapter. There are also four appendices: the first appendix is an answer key to the chapter tasks; the second appendix contains a Vocabulary Levels Test, one way for teachers to gauge the current vocabulary knowledge of students; the third appendix is a corpus-derived Academic Word List; and the fourth appendix contains the General Service List of the first 2,000 most frequently used words in English, alphabetically arranged.

Chapter 1 deals with how to balance a language course from a vocabulary perspective. Nation identifies four strands for an effective language course: meaning-focused input, language-focused learning, meaning-focused output, and fluency development. He outlines the following areas: the conditions that need to occur for each strand to work effectively; the vocabulary coverage, skills, and strategies learners need; and the activities and techniques teachers need to implement in order to facilitate effective vocabulary learning. Chapter 2 covers how to select the words to teach according to frequency and range. There is an explanation of the principles and procedures behind the teaching of high- and low-frequency words, academic words, and technical words.

Chapter 3 focuses on measuring learners' current vocabulary knowledge. Nation explains the Vocabulary Levels Test (Appendix 2 in the booklet), how to interpret it, and how to apply the results. Chapter 4

deals with teaching unfamiliar words in intensive reading texts. The author explains briefly the key principles behind vocabulary learning, lists teaching techniques, and, in the form of a task, asks the teacher to justify the reasons for using a particular technique to explain an unfamiliar word. Chapter 5 focuses on how to plan, in a principled fashion, an extensive reading program using graded readers at the beginner and intermediate levels. It includes key headings for the curriculum designer to consider, such as content and sequencing, format, monitoring, and assessment.

The final chapters are rather more specialized: Chapter 6 considers ways to train learners in guessing strategies for unknown words in context. Chapter 7 focuses on teaching specialized vocabulary to learners of English for special purposes, for example, those taking academic or vocational courses. It introduces a corpus-derived Academic Word List of 570 word families that are not in the first 2,000 most frequently used words in English (this list is claimed to cover 8.5 to 10% of the running words in academic text). The author first explains how the list was constructed and then advises that it be covered in a language course in all four strands, in addition to being learned by rote.

This booklet is concise, clearly laid-out, and very simply written. It can be recommended for new teachers, both native speakers of English and nonnative, and for teacher-trainers as an excellent basic principles and procedures guide to approaching vocabulary learning. The appendices are all very practical and useful for teachers. However, there are some notable content omissions: there is no mention of extensive reading for advanced learners and no mention either of the importance of teaching vocabulary in chunks, such as collocations and set phrases. In addition, most of the suggested techniques will be familiar to experienced teachers.

Methodology and Materials Design in Language Teaching: Current Perceptions and Practices and their Implications. Anthology Series 44. Willy A. Renandya, (Ed.). Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre, 2003. vi + 222 pp.

Reviewed by

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This three-part volume brings together 14 papers covering a wide range of perspectives from among those presented at the 37th SEAMEO RELC International Seminar of April 2002.

Section I (Materials Design and Evaluation in Language Teaching) comprises five articles, beginning with Richard R. Day's "Authenticity in the Design and Development of Materials," a thought-provoking challenge to the superiority of *authenticity* and a plea for a reconsideration of *appropriateness*. Next, Brian Tomlinson's "Humanising the Coursebook" poignantly underscores the primacy of accommodating learners' affective needs and suggests several practical ways of adapting to individual situational constraints. Then, in "Materials for New Technologies: Learning from Research and Practice," Denise E. Murray discusses considerations for designing and implementing computer-assisted language instruction, for which Beverly Derewianka subsequently provides a practical example in "Designing an On-Line Reference Grammar for Primary English Teachers," a description of the TeleNex project in Hong Kong. The section concludes with A. Mehdi Riazi's "What do Textbook Evaluation Schemes Tell Us? A Study of the Textbook Evaluation Schemes of Three Decades," which describes eight rubrics that have been proposed since the 1970s, situates them within the prevailing methodological frameworks of their time, and suggests implications for textbook appraisals today.

Section II (Methodology and Text) contains three articles, starting with Erwin Tschirner's "Skill, Text, and Register: Rethinking Grammar in the IT Age," an incisive reconceptualization of grammar from an information processing perspective. Next, in "Developing Academic Texts to Enhance Inference Use," Ronald L. Brown argues for the need to foster learners' inferencing skills and suggests numerous helpful strategies. The section ends with Amos Paran's "Helping Learners to Become Critical: How Coursebooks Can Help," a guide to creating activities that utilize

texts not just as linguistic objects or as vehicles for information transmission or even strategy instruction, but as conduits to thinking itself.

Finally, Section III (Materials in Use in Southeast Asia) includes six articles, the first of which is Andrew Gonzalez's "ESL Materials for Philippine Use in Primary and Secondary Schools: Across Four Paradigmatic Generations," a historical account of the development and spread of ELT materials in the Philippine context and an appeal for more serious research on their effectiveness. Next, in "Mandated English Teaching Materials and their Implications to Teaching and Learning: The Case of Indonesia," Iwan Jazadi critically evaluates his country's government-sponsored secondary-level English textbooks and signals the need for increased localization. Then, in "Where are the ELT Textbooks?" Shanti Chandran explains the reasons behind Malaysian teachers' overwhelming preference for workbooks as the instructional materials of choice. The following article, Bao Dat's "Localising ELT Materials in Vietnam: A Case Study," echoes Jazadi's earlier concerns and offers concrete examples of adaptation strategies under similar constraints. Next, in "Developing an Oral Communication Skills Training Package: Process and Product; Problems and Solutions," Gloria Poedjosoedarmo describes the evolution of a pan-ASEAN program to improve local teachers' speaking and listening abilities. The volume concludes with Carmel Heah and Li Shu Yun's "Collaborative Materials Design for Communication Skills Training in an Engineering Curriculum," an informative account of cooperation between language specialists and content experts in developing English for specific purposes (ESP) materials at a Singaporean university.

While the book provides an adequate overview of many current issues in this part of the field, it also has several significant shortcomings that need pointing out. First of all, numerous proofreading oversights exacerbate already stark differences in the quality of a few contributions. Next, not only is there no cross-referencing of recurring threads between articles, but there is not even a comprehensive subject index at the end. Finally, it is ironic that a collection in which the theme of localization plays such a prominent role includes neither biographical information about its contributors nor background on the publishing organization to assist readers in evaluating the relevance of its contents to their own individual contexts. Nevertheless, the Day, Tomlinson, and Tschirner articles alone are worth the price of the volume, which thus ultimately merits recommendation, however tentatively.

The Power of Context in Language Teaching and Learning. Jan Frodesen and Christine Holten (Eds.). Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 2005. 270 pp.

Reviewed by

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This slim volume of 270 pages packs a lot of punch. If readers liked Marianne Celce-Murcia's work, *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language* (2001), then they will like this volume as well because it supports and expands on the first with plenty of praxis and theory.

The purpose of this book is to inform the reader about the relationship between language and context, as is suggested by the title. There are some 30 contributing authors, most of whom are from west coast American universities. While most of these authors are English L1 speakers, there are a few EFL contributors. However, these contributors also are working in the United States. The reason I emphasize this is that the value of this book, although it is presumably intended for a global audience of language educators, ultimately pertains to the very dimension of context that its authors are at pains to inform us about. So much of the data is related to teaching English in America, which one could safely say is different from, for example, teaching English in Asia, that even if there are some Asian contributors to the volume, the focus of the book is definitely on an American context. Although the concepts espoused in this book are valuable, by and large they do not apply to my working situation, as my context is culturally entirely different from those under discussion.

The editors and several authors acknowledge being influenced by the Marianne Celce-Murcia's volume cited above which looks at language and cultural context as being interdependent, and not separable. The acknowledgement of Celce-Murcia is significant, as the volume under review can arguably be seen as a source book, which by described practice and theory supports the central task of teaching English as a second or foreign language in the light of Celce-Murcia's sound and respected approach.

More specifically, the balance of the *Power of Context* emphasizes teaching English as a second language in an American context, rather than teaching English as a foreign language in countries which are not

English-dominant. Many cultural contexts cited in the book as data do not realistically apply in places where English is taught as a foreign language. That said, the particular orientation of this book is interesting in terms of how it is written and constructed, and this is appealing to any language educator. The praxis, culture, and context is defined and limited, and in that respect its content cannot be universally applied. I am confident that the editors would accept this description as valid, as indeed it is a reflection of their very argument.

So how is this volume organized? There are four sections. The first one is about discovering what context reveals about grammatical structures. In this part, the contributing authors discuss how, by adopting contextual analysis, they have experienced, identified, and backgrounded different linguistic behaviors, such as the difficulty of explaining native speaker intuition, nouns without articles, and the distribution and meaning of *any*, *some*, and *every* in discourse. This section also includes some useful references for researchers, as well as information on how using expanded computer-based corpora can aid the investigator. Action-based research, or the teacher-as-researcher in his/her own classroom are also shown as valid methods of documenting contextual analysis.

The second part of the book broadens out into a discussion of varying methods of oral and written discourse analysis. Discourse pragmatic issues dominate these chapters, ranging from a discussion of requests, complaints, and apologies to an examination of the coherence of oral and written language between speakers/writers and listeners/readers. An interesting chapter for me here was the one on information structure, or how information is presented, in terms of given and new information. The concept of scaffolding vocabulary and conceptual expansion of words is an ongoing concern of language educators. I also enjoyed reading Jeanette DeCarrico's essay on questions of form and function in lexical phrases and discourse content.

An exploration of the interface between language skills and discourse makes up the third part of this book. The focus is the intersection of language skills, grammar, and discourse contexts. Top-down and bottom-up models are discussed, as is the role of grammar and context, and the relationship of one to the other. This section has a pragmatic ring to it. In addition, Tetsuo Harada from the University of Oregon has a nice discussion of the effects of CBI (content-based instruction) on learners of English as a second language.

The final part of this book deals with creating contexts for effective language teaching and is arguably the most appealing part of the book as

it deals with practical “how-to questions.” In particular, this section supports the assertion that reflective classroom researchers, who evaluate and rethink their approach as a result of the impact and feedback which they receive from the students, are likely to be more successful than teachers who automatically and robotically reach for the textbook and methodically work through it irrespective of the relevance or appropriateness of the material to the learning needs of students. This means that the thinking teacher, sensitive to the students’ ability to receive and comprehend, is ahead of the practitioner who follows a particular method because of his/her belief in its absolute superiority. It also means that the language educator remains the focus not so much as supplier, but rather facilitator of language learning, as the context and content are molded together with the place, needs, and aspirations of all participants.

In conclusion, for educators wishing to ground themselves in some of the governing concepts current in teaching English in America, this volume provides an attractive overview and gives sufficient references. The book is even indexed for this purpose. As a multilingual person, I regard many of the notions discussed somewhat self-evident and redundant, but that is only because I have empirically absorbed them through some 50-odd years of an examined life working mostly with people learning English as a first or second language outside the United States. What I especially liked about the book is that it is relatively ideologically unencumbered, in the sense that while it has succeeded in showing where current language teaching trends stand, it has not done so polemically, but with a freshness and originality that is to be commended.

Reference

Celce-Murcia, M. (Ed.). (2001). *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.