

Book Review

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Varcasia, Cecilia (ed.). 2011. Becoming multilingual: Language learning and language policy between attitudes and identities. Oxford: Peter Lang.

Many readers will have an intuitive impression of what it means to be multilingual and what multilingualism comprises. Multilingual communication, however, is about much more than the use of several languages to communicate; rather, it draws on a variety of different models of perception, thought patterns, and knowledge to produce a unique system. This, according to Cecilia Varcasia, is what *Becoming multilingual* attempts to illuminate. The collection comprises a selection of papers from the Sixth International Conference on Third Language Acquisition and Multilingualism, Bolzano, September 2009. By examining multilingualism from a sociolinguistic perspective, the collection aims to show the dynamic processes which build the phenomenon.

In her introductory chapter, Varcasia notes the growing importance of multilingualism in a globalised world, and the ever-increasing academic interest in the field. While traditional perspectives on bilingualism have been concerned with the acquisition of two languages to a point of high proficiency, Varcasia argues for a holistic approach to multilingualism, whereby the multilingual repertoire is considered a system in its own right, and each language serves its own particular functions.

Eight chapters constitute the body of the collection, and these fall into three main categories: the first focuses on the significance of multilingualism for the individual and the language community; the second deals with approaches to multilingual research; and the third addresses the relationship between formal education and multilingualism.

1 The significance of multilingualism for the individual and the language community

The opening paper in the volume, by Kärchner-Ober, describes language policy in Malaysia, and the effects this has on education and Malaysia's broader multi-

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ethnic society. The Malaysian government is keen to promote Bahasa Malay as the language of national unity and identity, but the growing presence of English leaves the country's other languages – of which there are over 100 – in a vulnerable position. Multilingual tensions in Malaysia then develop from state support of two languages which are not necessarily native to large minorities in that country, and which are themselves in a constant state of conflict.

Kerstin Kazzazi's paper reports on an empirical, longitudinal study focusing on trilingualism (German, English, and Farsi) in dialogue. The study aims to shed light on the functions of a third language, both in the discourse context and in the context of an individual's identity building. Kazazzi introduces the concept of "language mention", whereby the trilingual speaker refers to her third language in a conversation taking place through the medium of her other languages. By examining language mention in the context of trilingual discourse, the author argues that we gain insight into the value speakers attach to their languages, and thus into their linguistic identities.

Mady & Carr's chapter on "Immigrant perspectives on French language learning in English-dominant Canadian communities" takes as its theoretical basis imagined communities (Anderson 1991) and language as capital (Bourdieu 1977). These positions are explored using data from two earlier studies by the authors, who sought to explain why immigrant parents and students were interested in enrolling on school French programmes. As in other chapters in this volume, the parents expressed that learning French could improve employability prospects, academic success, and incorporation into the wider Canadian community. The authors further found that students also saw the learning of French as a means of expanding their own multilingual identities.

2 Approaches to multilingual research

In Caruana & Lasagabaster's empirically-based study of multilingualism in the Basque Country and Malta, a holistic approach to the study of multilingualism is advocated. The results presented are drawn from a survey of university students in these two officially bilingual regions. In both regions, students are taught the local official languages and a third language at school. Results show that a holistic approach, in which students are asked for their attitudes towards all three languages and the way they interact, provides different, more positive, results to more traditional questionnaires focusing on languages in isolation. This could have implications, not only for language policy, but also for education, helping teachers promote positive attitudes towards multilingualism and multilingual societies.

Cortinovic's chapter on the investigation of linguistic diversity in schools in South Tyrol reports on research conducted as part of the LINEE project, and deals with migrant multilingualism and minority languages. In addition, this paper suggests new ways of eliciting data from multilingual speakers, including the use of questionnaires to elicit the language used by multilingual speakers in a variety of sociolinguistic environments. Although Cortinovic observed very little multilingualism in action, she argues that if her new method is combined with other, more traditional, methods of data collection, participants' responses could be expanded upon (e.g., their reasons for choosing to use different

languages in different contexts), and the examination of individual multilingualism could be enhanced.

In a departure from the norms of linguistic research, Melo-Pfeifer's chapter turns the focus on researchers themselves. The author describes the analysis of a corpus of multilingual communication gathered from the interactions of the members of an international research team. Results showed that although French was a common language to all researchers, it was used mostly for the resolution of methodological or research issues; humour, courtesy, and discussion of the multilingual linguistic contract tended to be addressed multilingually, even within one discourse context. Melo-Pfeifer concludes that by being aware of multilingualism, the researchers in this study could predict and resolve potential linguistic problems, and help promote linguistic self-confidence among members of the team. Positive attitudes towards multilingualism, and positive awareness of multilingualism among researchers, could also contribute to an increase in multilingual research.

3 The relationship between formal education and multilingualism

Braun's chapter specifically examines how educational practices affect trilingual families' language use in England and Germany. Braun argues that as a multilingual child's dominant language is likely to change once she starts formal education, the challenge to maintain the home language becomes ever more difficult. The parents of school-aged children were interviewed in order to establish their own and their children's communicative methods in different social contexts. Results show the important effects community language education can have on multilingualism in the home, and suggest that restricting use of the community language to outside the home can impact positively on home language maintenance.

Hilmarsson-Dunn & Mitchell's study of multilingualism in English secondary schools is also part of the LINEE project (cf. Cortinovic above). This particular study applies social network theory to the multilingualism of migrants in England. The authors note that despite official EU cultural policy (which encourages individual multilingualism and language learning), the dominant ideology in most EU states is monolingualism. In the UK in particular, official education policy does not support multilingualism or community languages. Results indicate that migrant students were keen to integrate into English-speaking networks in order to improve economic and career opportunities, and to form friendship groups. Nonetheless, students were very proud of their multilingual abilities and identities.

4 Evaluation

The most positive aspect of this volume is its emphasis on multilingualism as a unique system, rather than a combination of a number of "monolingualisms". This stance is an important step in encouraging positive views towards multilingualism and language learning. Five of the volume's eight chapters deal explicitly with this issue (Caruana & Lasagabaster, Hilmarsson-Dunn &

Mitchell, Melo-Pfeifer, Kazzazi, and Mady & Carr), and it is clear how this fits into the overall theme of the volume of becoming multilingual.

A further strongpoint is the inclusion of papers which use or suggest innovative approaches to the investigation of multilingualism. As this is a relatively new field of research, it is important to develop new approaches to its investigation, rather than simply relying on previous methods designed to investigate mono- and bi-lingualism. Furthermore, those chapters which suggest new approaches to previously identified phenomena – e.g., Caruana & Lasagabaster and Cortinovic – ensure the study of multilingualism as a 21st century phenomenon is kept up-to-date. Melo-Pfeifer's chapter is of particular interest, as it is one of the few studies which conduct a meta-analysis of researchers' attitudes and the implications of these. The innovative nature of the volume is further enhanced by the inclusion of a selection of papers which are almost entirely based on recent empirical research, and in the investigation of the multilingualism of migrant communities. Large sweeps of migration have been a continuing trend for a number of decades, and it is important therefore to ensure that linguistic research keeps up with these social phenomena. Addressing the multilingualism of migrants in positive terms affords under-represented languages some prestige and highlights the day-to-day reality of multilingualism even in societies traditionally considered monolingual. At the same time, the inclusion of studies of majority language multilingualism shows that multilingualism is the unmarked language state of many speakers in a range of communities.

A number of theoretical approaches are drawn upon in this volume, including social network theory, language hierarchies, and socio-constructivism. While the broad theme of sociolinguistics ensures a theoretical and topical consistency, the inclusion of a range of theoretical standpoints helps create a volume which will appeal to a wide readership, and which maintains the reader's interest throughout. This variety also highlights the range of approaches that can be taken to the study of multilingualism, even within one subfield of linguistics.

The collection is not without its weaknesses. As global economics becomes more dependent on Asia – India and China in particular – a discussion of multilingualism in these countries, or in relation to them, would have been welcome. Of course, Kärchner-Ober's chapter on multilingualism in Malaysia deals directly with Asia and Asian languages. However, this chapter constitutes only 1/8 of the volume, and its inclusion seems to be almost a token gesture: while the remaining seven studies are focused on empirical data, this is more a report on the state of affairs in Malaysia, and does not gel quite so well with the style of the rest of the collection. Although the final chapter focuses on Canada, it is important to note that again this study deals not only with the West, but also with European languages. More focus on multilingualism as a phenomenon outwith Europe and its languages would have been welcome. Whether the absence of such discussion is a deliberate decision of the editor, or reflects the Eurocentric nature of the conference from which these papers were selected, is unclear.

A focus on multilingualism in the education system is very important, particularly as this area has many implications for language policy. However, some more focus on adult multilingualism would have been appreciated. As more adults are encouraged to become multilingual for the purposes of work or travel, the number of new multilingual speakers increases. The issues these speakers face are likely to be quite different to those faced by migrants, or those

living in multilingual regions, and indeed the motivations behind and ultimate goals of these speakers may be quite different to those of school-aged children. We should not forget that language learning is for people of all ages, and the volume may have benefitted from slightly more emphasis on the adult experience.

Nevertheless, the book should be an appealing read for those with an interest in language education, multilingual societies, and sociolinguistic communities. It is a necessary and strong addition to the "Linguistic Insights" series, providing new insight into an emerging field, and innovative approaches to linguistic research. For the most part, papers appear well chosen and reflect a range of unique contributions. Most chapters engage well with the aims of the collection, highlighting that multilingualism is dynamically constructed, and occurs in a variety of social contexts. This volume is highly recommended to postgraduate and senior researchers alike, and will bring the reader up to date with the most recent developments in this exciting field.

References

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