

University of Pennsylvania

From the SelectedWorks of Elizabeth C Scheyder

November 2002

Review of the book Reflections on multiliterate lives

Contact
Author

Start Your Own
SelectedWorks

Notify Me
of New Work



Available at: http://works.bepress.com/elizabeth_scheyder/4

“We could suspend the adult-child dichotomy and explore the language of both groups, in a range of similar or equivalent discursive contexts, to discover how relevant a variable ‘being a child’ turns out to be” (213). I believe, however, that more is to be gained from Sealy’s argumentation than from her own empirical research. Other research dealing with children’s interactions has proved that ethnography should be at the core of such an enterprise (de León 1998, Goodwin 1990, Ochs 1988, Schieffelin 1990).

REFERENCES

- de León, Lourdes (1998). The emergent participant: Interactive patterns in the socialization of Tzotzil (Mayan) children. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 8:131–61.
- Fowler, Roger (1991). *Language in the news: Discourse and ideology in the press*. London: Routledge.
- Goodwin, Marjorie Harness (1990). *He-said-she said: Talk as social organization among black children*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Heath, Shirley Brice (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ochs, Elinor (1988). *Culture and language development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- , & Schieffelin, Bambi (1995). The impact of language socialization on grammatical development. In Fletcher Paul & MacWhinney Brian (eds.), *The handbook of child language*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Schieffelin, Bambi (1990). *The give and take of everyday life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stubbs, Michael (1996). *Text and corpus analysis*. Oxford: Blackwell.

(Received 11 March 2002)

Language in Society 31 (2002). Printed in the United States of America
DOI: 10.1017/S0047404502245054

DIANE BELCHER and ULLA CONNOR, eds., *Reflections on multiliterate lives*. (Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, Vol. 26, Series editors Colin Baker & Nancy Hornberger.) Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters, 2001. Pp. vii, 211. Hb \$79.95, pb \$29.95.

Reviewed by ELIZABETH SCHEYDER¹
Educational Linguistics, University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA 19104
scheydec@sas.upenn.edu

Many authors write books and papers about deficits in second language teaching and competence, shining a spotlight on what teachers are doing “wrong” or what students are lacking. In this volume, Diane Belcher and Ulla Connor set out to provide a model that bypasses these negative perspectives and showcases success stories in second (or *n*th) language learning. The result is a compilation of auto-ethnographies from 18 adults with successful professional careers who were asked to provide their “L1/L2 literacy autobiograph(ies)” (p. 209).

Most of the entries in this volume are presented as autobiographical essays, but a few are presented as interviews with one of the editors. The book divides the

18 essays into two halves: Part I presents essays from 10 people whose professions revolve around language, while Part II presents 8 essays and interviews from people who are in fields that are not directly language-related. Each essay or interview provides a window into the personal joys and hardships experienced by these people as they learned their second or third (or twelfth!) language.

Part I begins with an essay by Suresh Canagarajah, a professor of English literature, who describes his trial-and-error development of a writing style acceptable to Western academic audiences. This was problematic for Canagarajah because the didactic and factual style of Western academic writing is very different from the style of writing that is valued in his native Tamil in Sri Lanka, where facts are presented so that the reader can “discover” the conclusions along with the writer, and where the style of writing is generally more emotional. The second essay is similar to the first; Vijay Bhatia describes his unlikely path to English and linguistics, chosen over physics and chemistry because it would allow more time for playing cricket in grad school. Bhatia presents a much more positive take on his introduction to academic writing in English, during which he found that his determination and willingness to take risks, along with the help of some talented advisors, enabled him to make the transition more smoothly.

The third essay is slightly different. Nils Erik Enkvist describes his trilingual professional career, straddling the Finnish and Swedish of his parents’ home and the English that he learned in school. Enkvist attributes at least part of his interest in linguistics to his parents’ insistence that he address them individually in their native languages – Swedish for his father, and Finnish for his mother. Håkan Ringbom, one of Enkvist’s students who also grew up in Finland, contributes the fourth essay. Ringbom was raised in a Swedish-speaking home in Finland but never became fully bilingual in Finnish because of limited opportunities to use the language. Like Enkvist, Ringbom learned English in school, and like many other authors in this volume, he appreciates the development of electronic word processing for facilitating revisions, and the assistance of a native English-speaking colleague for reviewing documents.

Next, Anna Söter describes her experience in a German-speaking Austrian family that was transplanted to Australia when she was a child, and her subsequent professional life in the United States. Soter says that she recognizes influences of her native German language on her English writing to this day, and she is particularly sensitive to differences among academic English varieties because of her education in Australia and America.

The sixth and seventh essays concern people whose professional lives have been transplanted to Israel. Adina Levine describes growing up in Soviet-era Lithuania, where she spoke Lithuanian at home, attended a Russian-language school, and learned English at university. In each of these languages, writing that closely mirrored a model was valued, which was not very effective preparation for academic writing in English in Israel. Aside from being the only native speaker of English in this volume, Andrew Cohen presents a remarkable story of his

acquisition, to varying degrees, of twelve languages, but he focuses on his acquisition of Hebrew in Israel. After finding Hebrew classes in the US and Israel to be insufficient preparation for life as a researcher and instructor in Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Cohen resorted to a variety of means to increase his reading skills and speed and to hone his writing. He describes a very long and difficult process of acquiring the competences he needed, again relying on native-speaker colleagues for editorial assistance, but never ultimately reaching native-like use of Hebrew. Both these essays show that adult language learners can learn enough of a second (or twelfth) language to function professionally as long as they have some assistance, but without ever becoming really comfortable and confident in the language.

Ryuko Kubota and Miyuki Sasaki both deal with professional uses of English by native speakers of Japanese. Kubota received her Ph.D. in Canada and now teaches in the US. She credits her well-developed L1 literacy with helping her to develop L2 literacy in English, but she admits that she still seeks models of good writing and assistance from native speakers. Sasaki also came from a highly literate L1 background and also earned graduate degrees in North American universities, but she now teaches in Japan and uses English only because it is professionally necessary. Sasaki says that she plans and drafts papers in Japanese, then produces an English final product; Kubota, probably because of her immersion in English, performs the whole process in English.

The final essay of Part I is by Jun Liu, a native of China who obtained a Ph.D. and now teaches in the US. Liu describes his embarrassment at being placed in an ESL composition class during his first semester as a Ph.D. student in the US, where he was studying second language acquisition and was supposedly fluent in English. He provides hope, however, by describing how his continual practice of academic writing in English has improved his skill in this area so much that he was able to publish papers in English within a few years of moving to the US.

Whereas all the authors in Part I are professionals in language-related fields, perhaps giving them some additional insight into their own language learning, the authors in Part II are from fields varying from mathematics to medicine. Far from being naive about their own language development, however, these authors present pragmatic and unaffected accounts of their struggles and triumphs in second language acquisition.

The first author in Part II, Ming-Daw Tsai, wryly notes that his days are not those of the stereotypical chemistry professor, working at a lab bench for long hours, but instead are mostly spent writing for various academic and administrative purposes. He echoes the consternation of many of the contributors at their problems communicating when they arrived in the US after achieving high marks in EFL classes and high TOEFL scores. Tsai recognizes that learning English is a lifelong process, as is all learning, and he cautions other nonnative speakers of English to continue to read widely and participate in society, and not to allow their language limitations to limit their lives.

The second essay in Part II is one of the most interesting in the book. Here Louis de Branges describes his experiences being raised in Paris by parents whose L1 was English, but who communicated with him entirely in French. This plan was disrupted, however, when World War II broke out and de Branges and his mother and siblings returned to the US, leaving his father in France. Once back in the US, his mother quickly lost her command of French, and an unusual parent-child language gap developed. Thus, at the age of nine, de Branges became an ESL student in the United States, even though his mother was a native speaker of English. He now considers himself bilingual in French and English, but he attributes his mastery of English to his experiences learning other languages, including German and Russian, and he feels that multiple languages give learners insight into language learning that enables them to achieve a higher degree of competence in a third language than they would have been able to achieve if it were their only foreign language.

The third chapter in Part II is the first interview-format entry. Here Diane Belcher interviews Hooshang Hemami, an electrical and biomedical engineer from Iran. Hemami echoes some of the same sentiments expressed by Tsai, in the sense that he was motivated to learn English to a level that would allow him to express himself freely and enrich his life with literature, philosophy, and a variety of other fields.

In another interview, also conducted by Belcher, Robert Agunga expresses a desire to be able to do more than just his professional work in English. A native of Ghana, Agunga moved from studying agriculture in his native country to studying communication in the US. His studies and his use of English are all motivated by a desire to make a difference in the lives of agricultural communities in Africa.

Anahid Dervartanian Kulwicki describes her experience of growing up in an Armenian family in Lebanon, where she spoke Armenian at home but learned Arabic and English at an early age at school. Like other authors, Kulwicki emphasizes the importance of having a friend or colleague proofread work in a nonnative language, but she also cautions readers to be wary of hypercritical colleagues. Kulwicki describes a sort of experiment that she did after feeling that her writing was being unfairly criticized: She gave published work by people other than herself to these colleagues, presenting it as her own draft being submitted for review. Confirming her suspicion, even these texts came back with corrections. This is not to say that there might not have been true errors that escaped the text's editors, but it does point to an overly critical, even biased attitude among some of her peers.

Maria Juliá expresses some of the same frustrations of working in a nonnative language, but she has found that she has been somewhat freed by tenure. Being more secure in her position, she can now read in English for pleasure and has found that this has expanded and improved her use of this L2. This is followed by the first interview conducted by Ulla Connor, where she speaks to Luis Proenza,

a neurobiologist and university administrator in the US. Proenza was raised in northern Mexico, so Spanish was his L1. Although his parents had very little formal education, Proenza's father had lived and worked in New York for several years, so he valued English as a requirement for success and was able to begin to teach it to his son. Even though Proenza has lived and worked primarily in English since he moved to the US at age 11, he still feels that his L1 Spanish improves his writing in English by suggesting metaphors and synonyms that enrich his texts.

The book closes with Connor's interview of Steven Beering, a professor of medicine and university president who echoes some of Proenza's ideas about language enrichment. In Beering's case, he was raised in a French/German bilingual family but moved to England at age 13, and then on to the US at 15. Despite being in a somewhat technical field, Beering reads extensively in poetry and literature, and credits this broader exposure to English with much of his development in the language.

Together, these essays provide an informative window into the language-learning lives of 18 very interesting people. Belcher and Connor have selected a good cross section of first languages and cultures, as well as family literacy backgrounds, and have crafted these into a logical progression of very diverse essays.

NOTE

¹ I am grateful to Nancy Hornberger for feedback on a draft of this review. I am solely responsible for the remaining shortcomings.

(Received 15 January 2002)

Language in Society 31 (2002). Printed in the United States of America
DOI: 10.1017/S0047404502255050

DENNIS AGER, *Motivation in language planning and language policy*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters, 2001. Pp. vi, 210. Pb. \$24.95.

KAS DEPRez & THEO DU PLESSIS, eds., *Multilingualism and government: Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland, former Yugoslavia, South Africa*. (Studies in language policy in South Africa.) Pretoria: Van Schaik, 2000. Pp. xii, 179.

Reviewed by CHRISTINA BRATT PAULSTON
Linguistics, University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, PA 15260
paulston@imap.pitt.edu

The two books under review, *Motivation in language planning and language policy (MLPP)* and *Multilingualism and government (M&G)*, are both about language policy, at least at one level, and both are, or claim to be, based on case studies. That is the end of any similarity between them.