

BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

JEAN-JACQUES WEBER & KRISTINE HORNER. *Introducing multilingualism: A social approach*. London, UK: Routledge (2012). 214 pp. Paper: \$31.95. (ISBN 978-0-415-60997-5).

Introducing Multilingualism: A Social Approach is a significant and timely contribution to the study of multilingualism. It is international in scope, theoretically up-to-date, and it introduces readers to a wide range of current and critical issues in language studies. These include: how to define language, national and educational language policies, language and identity, individual and societal multilingualism, and multilingual education. Each of the 15 chapters, arranged into 6 thematic parts, ends with suggestions for activities, class or group discussions, projects, and suggestions for further reading. These features encourage readers to critically engage with the topics introduced in each chapter. The book, which is aimed at undergraduate students of sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, and multilingualism, serves as a solid foundation for future sociolinguists. I would also recommend this book for graduate students who wish to get wide-ranging survey of the field. Weber and Horner, both well-established scholars in multilingualism, specifically in multilingual education in Luxembourg, provide a clearly-written, informative, and comprehensive synthesis of the advances made in this field of study in the past decade.

The authors begin, most fundamentally, by problematizing the notion of language as a fixed entity with stable boundaries. Consequently, multilingualism is not interpreted as the sum of several distinct languages, but rather as “linguistic resources and repertoires” (p. 3). In this sense, everyone is multilingual to some extent because we all have access to a range of registers, genres, accents, and varieties. This definition, which moves sociolinguistic theory beyond a structuralist notion of language as relatively unchanging, is central to advancing the main goal of the book: normalizing multilingualism. This goal is achieved through the authors’ focus on language ideologies and their role in inclusion and exclusion. The authors demonstrate how common language ideologies, such as the ideology of purism, the one nation / one language ideology, and the standard language ideology, propagate the marginalization of certain groups of people,

both in educational settings and in wider society. Using language ideology to understand multilingualism enables the authors to capture the complexities and nuances of current socio-political and linguistic contexts. For example, by interrogating standard language ideology in European schools, the authors advocate an approach to multilingual education that respects and recognizes all of the linguistic resources that students bring to class, rather than just those that have been politically and historically constructed as dominant.

Introducing Multilingualism: A Social Approach holds true to its name, though I would hesitate to say that it does so entirely. It provides an overview of current issues, and what it sacrifices in detail, it makes up for in breadth of topics. However, in regards to the social approach, tensions surface in a few places. For example, although this approach was so clearly outlined in Chapter 1, the authors veer off course in their rather superficial description of the Canadian language policy context (Chapter 8). They write, “the Canadian metaphor of a cultural mosaic promotes respect and support for not only the two official languages but *for all the languages* within the official bilingual framework” (p. 97; emphasis added). Although they acknowledge that the Multiculturalism Act of 1988 has been criticized as being celebratory, they do not extend this critique to the Official Languages Act. As a result, they fall into simplifying a historically and politically charged language climate that has been well documented (e.g., Haque, 2012; Lamarre & Lamarre, 2009), thereby weakening the social approach they are advocating. However, this is by no means the most grievous slip away from the social approach.

The more significant tension in the book emerges in the Chapter 7, “Language and identities.” Here, the authors problematize the concept of code-switching, which has played a significant role in traditional (structuralist) sociolinguistics: It refers to moments when multilinguals switch from one language to another, often in mid-sentence. Though the authors recognize the limits of code-switching for a social approach to multilingualism, they continue to talk about multilinguals’ language practices in terms of code-switching, “for lack of a better term” (p. 86). This decision seems unwarranted, in part in light of the theoretical grounding that was so carefully laid out in the introduction. It is also puzzling, because in Chapter 9, “Flexible vs. fixed multilingualism,” the authors draw on the works of key scholars (e.g., Creese & Blackledge, 2008; García, 2009) who have challenged the usefulness of code-switching and have argued for a new way of interpreting and accounting for multilingual languaging, one that is congruent with the social approach: translanguaging. Yet for some reason, although Weber and Horner are clearly familiar with that literature, the term is not mentioned in the book. I would have expected an introduction to translanguaging in Chapter 7, which would remedy the slip back to code-switching; I would also have expected a brief mention of the term in Chapter 9, which discusses language-in-education policies, and

Chapter 10, which advocates developing literacy bridges between home and school linguistic resources.

Notwithstanding these small epistemological slips, *Introducing Multilingualism* achieves its goal of normalizing multilingualism. The reader is left with a sense of how languages are used, and how they have been constructed in an array of contemporary contexts. In Chapter 3, “What is a language?,” the authors make a distinction between a popular (structuralist) and expert (social approach) model of what a language is. After reading this book, the reader will emerge, if not already, an expert in this regard. The book conveniently concludes with suggestions for new directions in multilingualism research. These should inspire new scholars in their multilingualism ventures and contribute to further articulating the tools needed for a social approach to multilingualism.

ALISON CRUMP, *McGill University*

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