

HOFFMANN, CHARLOTTE & YTSMA, JEHANNES (Ed.) (2004). *Trilingualism in Family, School and Community*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters (= Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 43). 242 pp. ISBN 1853596930. \$89,95.

With compilations of readings it is often difficult to determine the common denominator of the various articles, and the title of the present volume alleviates this dilemma only slightly. The editors characterize the articles as being "sociolinguistically oriented", which provides a somewhat clearer, but still fairly wide, range of issues to be discussed. The reader is curious to discover what is awaiting him or her in the eleven contributions which form the body of the volume.

Divided into three sections, the book offers papers on theoretical aspects of trilingualism—more specifically, a model used to account for individual tri- or multilingualism—, on contextual (societal and familial) aspects of trilingualism, and finally on policy issues involved in multilingual educational and societal contexts. Altogether, the papers present a rather colourful picture of various national and societal contexts in which more than two languages are acquired and/or learned.

The volume opens with an introduction by the editors, the first part of which is dedicated to relevant issues, such as a discussion of terminology use in sociolinguistic research, the increasing internationalisation and accompanying it, the dominance of English in many areas of life, and the differentiation of trilingualism from bilingualism studies. Each contribution is then briefly reviewed before the first section begins.

The first chapter, by Larissa Aronin and Muiris Ó Laoire, is in effect a section in itself, although the second chapter is included in Part 1, titled "Contexts of Trilingualism". In their contribution, the authors specify and expand the notion of "multilinguality" which they have discussed previously in other contexts. In this view, multilinguality is a personal characteristic and involves an individual's store of all his or her interlanguages, as well as metalinguistic awareness, language learning strategies and even emotional factors such as opinions, preferences and knowledge about languages, their use and the learning of them. Thus, multilinguality is also defined as an individual's linguistic identity. Confusing to the reader in this context is the use of "multilinguality" to define other situations; however, given the difficulties that the linguistic research community often seems to have in defining basic terms such as "multilingual" or "third language acquisition", this should not be taken as serious criticism. Most interesting—although this is less a "study" as described by the authors than a discussion—is perhaps the authors' explanation of nine characteristics which an individual multilingual system may possess at any given point in time. These characteristics have been referred to in other publications by the same authors and correlate in many ways with the Dynamic Model of Multilingualism, proposed by Philip Herdina and Ulrike Jessner (also mentioned by Aronin and Ó Laoire). The authors characterize their own model as reflecting the characteristics of a "bionic system", making no mention of its earlier name "Ecological Model of Multilinguality". This was the main irritation with which I was left after reading the article; however, this will not be a problem for readers who are not intimately familiar with the authors' work. In general, the paper is an interesting discussion of various characteristics of linguistic systems and can be recommended for researchers and students who are unfamiliar with the wider scope of multilingualism (or multilinguality).

-2-

The second chapter, by Elite Olshtain and Frieda Nissim-Amatai, fits better into the second section of the volume. It reports on the results of a questionnaire and interview study in Israel among a group of minority language (Circassian) schoolchildren and a smaller group of their teachers. The most interesting concept presented here is that of a "multilingual standard", which is common to contexts where many languages are acquired and learned at a young age, and differs from the "monolingual standard", the standard by which monolingual speakers judge their language competencies. The multilingual perception, by contrast, is more open and flexible, allowing for partial competencies and the use of specific languages for specific purposes without a 'reduction' in the self-perception of being multilingual: multilingualism is the ability to use each language according to the way in which one needs to use it. Policy makers, teachers, parents and learners could all benefit from a careful consideration of this standard. Since the paper deals much more extensively with this issue and with the attitudes of schoolchildren towards their languages and the situation in which they use the various codes, a more appropriate title would refer to multilingual standards rather than the—provocative but somewhat misleading—question of "Being Trilingual or Multilingual: Is There a Price to Pay?".

Next, Patricia Lamarre and Diane Dagenais present the results of an interview study among trilingual Canadian adolescents in two Canadian cities. The results show that students view their own multilingualism positively, namely as a resource that allows them access to wider social circles, later to improved employment possibilities, and more extensive knowledge; but they also judge their individual languages according to their market value in their particular location and situation. The results offer an insight into similarities between

adolescents in a French-speaking and an English-speaking environment, but as with the previous paper, the title of this third chapter is somewhat misleading: the subject is here less "language practices" and could more accurately be described as "opinions about languages spoken and multilingualism".

The fourth chapter discusses a fascinating socio-linguistic phenomenon dubbed "language crossing" (originally from Rampton, 1995). In this practice, speakers of one code change over to another one—a code of a community of which they are not an accepted member—for specific purposes, generally without communicative competence in the second language. This phenomenon is especially common among young people and has been shown to exist in various contexts, here concerning Turkish and Italian youth in an urban multiethnic community in Germany. The author, Gabrielle Birken-Silverman, based her data on interviews and language conversational data. The results reveal that language crossings were involved in five areas: greetings, apologies, thanks, love declarations and personal insults; the "other" language was often used for *dissing* (showing disrespect). That lexical and lexical/pragmatic crossing occurs is well-substantiated by the data provided and by other studies (i.e., the aforementioned study by Rampton 1995). However, Birken-Silverman also includes grammatical structures in her categorization, which is more difficult to accept: it involves phrases and words such as "bello"/"bella", "ti amo" and "io"—which, I would argue, could have been learned as chunks with no understanding of morphosyntactical relations (one way to investigate this issue could be to offer a new, unknown adjective without an ending to a young person and ask how he or she would use it to define a male or female). The author then concludes her discussion by stating that "TLA is directed toward lexical and pragmatic skills, including certain functional registers and certain communicative patterns mainly related to street culture." (95) I would question, however, considering this type of crossing as third-language acquisition since the "learners" used fixed lexical items or short phrases in set situations, such as picking up girls, "dissing" others or talking about food. One could as easily propose that youth discourse is a different language altogether and that all German youth grow up "bilingually" in this regard; generally, this is considered a question of register selection and not of language learning. Thus, I would tend to categorize this study as a study of language crossing, but not of TLA, since "acquisition" is restricted to a few lexical items and chunks, and the youth had no intention of acquiring even partial competencies in the other minority language.

-3-

The subsequent chapter, by Hui-Chi Lee, presents an overview of the present language situation in Taiwan and discusses the results of a questionnaire study among young aborigines. Background information as well as data on language attitudes were collected. While the attitude information is interesting and could lead to questions regarding the language policy of Taiwan—Mandarin is by most counts the clear winner—the background information is more difficult to interpret as it is based solely on self-evaluation and approximations. Youth were asked how well they speak their various languages (a tricky method of investigation, as self-judgments of language ability depend to a great extent on learner personality), and language use was rated on a scale of 1 (never) to 3 (usually), which is also rather vague. Somewhat bothersome is also a certain naiveté on the part of the researcher (he expresses regret that, despite two hours of native language teaching per week over one year, the students' language ability did not improve much) as well as the use of blanket statements which do not seem to be supported by the study. Thus, the concluding statement that the "two main ethnic groups, Chinese and aborigines, now tend to respect one another's cultures and languages" (116) is difficult to reconcile with the study's findings that Southern Min is used to make fun of aborigines, and is supported neither by the study, nor is further information provided by the author.

The final paper in this second section, "Trilingual Input and Children's Language Use in Trilingual Families in Flanders" by Annick de Houwer, deals with relationships between parental input patterns and the lack of active trilingual usage by their children. This is an interesting new research approach since studies tend to focus on the learning advantages brought about by growing up in a trilingual context. The questionnaire study found that in 93% of the cases in which children spoke all three languages, the parents did not speak Dutch (the "third" language) at home and both parents spoke both of the home languages—a finding with implications for parents who raise their children so that they may become bilingual. Unfortunately, the length and formulation of the questionnaire cannot really provide accurate data; the form involved only a reference to "language(s) spoken at home" (for parents as well as children) and thus cannot provide information on productive vs. receptive skills or on the extent of language use. Since "speaking" a language was also left completely undefined, a child who tended to prefer language X as well as Danish, but was able to understand (and perhaps produce) communication in language Y could have been seen by the parent as being bilingual, instead of trilingual—a problem not discussed by the author. More comprehensive research in this direction could yield truly interesting results and propose new questions for the study of trilingualism in the home.

The third section of the volume deals with language and educational policy and contains papers describing the language policies of various regions and the reactions to these policies. The opening paper, dealing with the historical and present-day language policy in the Israeli educational system, describes the Israeli language

context and reports how Hebrew and Arabic language and non-language teachers feel about the language policy followed there. The questionnaire survey—distributed among 135 teachers from the Jewish sector and 109 from the Arab sector—focused on the question to what extent language policy, as mandated by the Ministry of Education in Israel, is known and implemented in the schools by teachers. The findings showed that Arab teachers are more accepting of the need to learn all official languages, while Jewish-sector teachers agree with the Israeli language policy in principle, yet wish to maintain the hegemony of Hebrew, the majority language, and English, the language of wider communication and prestige. The authors, Anat Stavans and Doon Narkiss, thus seem to deal more with language attitudes and knowledge of the language policy than with the actual implementation of the policy by teachers. Nonetheless the study provides an interesting perspective on the Israeli language situation and policy.

-4-

The following chapter, by Carol Benson, focuses on language policies in Guinea-Bissau, a country with 30 indigenous languages, a creole (Kiriol) serving as the country's *lingua franca* (thus the L2), and Portuguese (the L3, used in government and schools), in which (in 1985) 95% of the population over the age of seven was primarily orate; only .2% had finished six years of primary school. The language situation is fascinating from a European standpoint. The author reports on the positive results of L2-L3 bilingual schooling as opposed to L3 submersion, which seems to result in subtractive bilingualism. The fact that the Guinean model does not recognise the importance of the mother tongue in literacy is regrettable; however, since this is often not feasible (due to a lack of resources or political will), the author concentrates on the effects and opportunities for teaching in the L2 or the L3. The author concludes with suggestions for change within the system, including a possible primary trilingual mode with instruction in the mother tongue.

In the next paper, Felix Etxebarria focuses on a bilingual region, the Basque Country, where school languages depend on the model used—either primarily Basque or Spanish with the other language learned as a school subject, the balanced use of both languages, or instruction in Spanish only without any consideration of Basque. The author offers a survey of previous research in the learning and teaching of English as an early foreign language within this context, questioning the value of early English programmes. He concludes by suggesting that English should not be introduced into the schools before the age of 6 because there seems to be no evidence that this has a positive effect on the learning of English. This is certainly an interesting hypothesis and should be investigated further in additional studies, for example, studies focusing on the different language skills as opposed to general test results (as was the case in this study) and in differing language education models.

Staying in the Basque context and dealing with the question of English as a third language, Jasone Cenoz looks at attitudes and motivation in the learning of this L3. English is now taught in most schools from the age of four on, and the study shows that younger learners tend to develop significantly more positive attitudes towards this L3 than older learners did. This could be an effect of school children becoming generally disillusioned with school as they age, or also with the teaching methods used in primary vs. secondary school, since primary school classes tend to focus on the spoken language and to involve playful learning. Among learners in the same school year, those who received less English instruction also seemed to have more positive attitudes than those with more English instruction. The authors can only guess at possible explanations, especially in light of contradictory studies from Barcelona. It would be interesting to see if these results hold for early vs. later L2 and L3 learning, but as the authors note, "due to the specific and complex educational and social factors involved in third language learning in bilingual contexts it is more likely that we would find several optimal ages for the introduction of a third language than a single one" (215).

English as the L3 remains the focal point of the final paper in this volume. Kaj Sjöholm describes the Finnish language learning context and explains the influence of the media in students' preference for conversational and American English compared to teachers' preference for British and academic English. The focus of the paper seems to be the students' preferences for a certain variety of English, their L3; the findings show that up to the age of 15, students are more affected by the American variety than older students, and that they also prefer conversational English to academic English. These findings are probably due to the students' exposure to the mass media outside of school which could amount to 40 to 50 hours per week. Here, the inclusion of information on the L1 and/or L2 (and L4) could do much to clarify these results. Would students also prefer conversational language to the academic variety in their L2 or in their L4? If so, then perhaps it is less the influence of the mass media that is producing these results than the school children's belief about the importance of learning any foreign language not used in schooling, and what they consider to be of secondary importance.

-5-

In their introduction to the volume, the editors referred briefly to the problem of cultural and linguistic tensions associated with multilingual individual life histories or present in multilingual societies; they found it gratifying that "in three of the contributions which focus on adolescents the young people find new and original ways of acquiring and making use of their languages and of negotiating their identities" (6). The reader wonders if the editors are truly surprised at this adaptation and outlook of the adolescents involved (considering the contexts in which they are acquiring their languages—contexts in which all languages are afforded a certain positive status), especially since Hoffmann herself had the benefit of growing up bilingually and raising her own children in a trilingual setting. Hoffmann's own studies are renowned for their in-depth analysis of trilingual acquisition, and if I missed one research area in this volume, it is a more intensive investigation of trilingual familial situations—one which Hoffmann, among others, could have provided.

References

Rampton, Ben (1995). *Crossing: Language and Ethnicity Among Adolescents*. New York: Longman.

NICOLE MARX
(Technische Universität Darmstadt)

Copyright © 2006 *Zeitschrift für Interkulturellen Fremdsprachenunterricht*

<p>HOFFMANN, CHARLOTTE & YTSMA, JEHANNES (Ed.) (2004). <i>Trilingualism in Family, School and Community</i>. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters (= Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 43). 242 pp. ISBN 1853596930. Rezensiert von Nicole Marx. <i>Zeitschrift für Interkulturellen Fremdsprachenunterricht</i> [Online], 11 (1), 5 pp. Abrufbar unter http://www.ualberta.ca/~german/ejournal/HoffmannYtsma.htm</p>

[Zurück zur [Leitseite](#)]