

HERDINA, PHILIP & JESSNER, ULRIKE. (2002). *A Dynamic Model of Multilingualism. Perspectives of Change in Psycholinguistics*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. 188 pages, \$ 74,95.

This is a book whose time has come. *A Dynamic Model of Multilingualism* (DMM henceforth) by Herdina and Jessner sets for itself several ambitious purposes:

- to provide a new model and a new set of concepts for the interpretation of psycholinguistic phenomena observed in speakers of more than one language;
- to provide a convincing and useful model or metaphor which should enable us to think about a multitude of seemingly contradictory and confusing phenomena related to multilingualism in a more coherent and cogent way;
- to determine the relations among various factors within the language systems, and to make predictions concerning the typical development of these variables;
- to provide an innovative theoretical framework in which it is possible to ask meaningful questions concerning multilingual development and obtain more satisfactory answers to the plethora of questions surrounding multilingualism as a psycholinguistic phenomenon with sociolinguistic consequences.

Drawing together first and second language acquisition theories, bilingual research, and dynamic systems theory, the authors present a highly complex, all-embracing psycholinguistic model of multilingualism. Their critical survey of recent research examines leading, and often contradictory, hypotheses and phenomena, in the light of trilingual and multilingual concepts and issues. Attempting to bring insight and order into the present theoretical inconsistencies, they mold a framework that can serve as a basis for future theoretical research and practical applications.

In her state-of-the-art account of research into trilingualism and its place with bilingualism studies, Charlotte Hoffman (2001) concludes:

“It seems, at least for the time being, that no new research tools are necessary, but there is a shortage of generalisable knowledge and explanatory models to account for bilingual as well as trilingual phenomena. In the course of this discussion I have pointed to several areas that remain to be explored, such as questions related to linguistic behaviour, transfer of skills and knowledge, language processing, metalinguistic awareness and communicative sensitivity” (p. 23).

It is precisely the generalisable knowledge and explanatory models that DMM offers.

The sociolinguistic underpinning for this new approach is a widely held misconception of the bilingual as a double monolingual in one person. Much research on second language acquisition and bilingualism points to underachievement or partial achievement. The authors protest as much against the social injustice as against the scientific error following from this viewpoint.

“As long as bilinguals are measured according to monolingual criteria, they appear to be greatly disadvantaged both in linguistic and cognitive terms” (p. 7).

The hidden agenda of this book, then, is to question and redefine basic assumptions in order to enable the continuation of future research in a more fruitful direction – emphasizing the positive achievements of multilinguals in addition to admitting their difficulties. The authors redefine terms such as Transfer and Interference, and examine the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, Interlanguage, Additive & Subtractive Bilingualism, Universal Grammar, Codeswitching and Borrowing phenomena, and Cummins' BICS/CALP distinction between competence modules. They assert that contact between two language systems is not always unidirectional (L1 → L2), but multifaceted and not always predictable. Arguing that language systems do not exist without influencing each other but are multidirectional, they adopt the concept of crosslinguistic interaction to include codeswitching and borrowing as well.

The authors describe phenomena which, while not appearing to be significant in the language processing of monolingual speakers, can be very pronounced in multilingual speakers, for example, the possibility of the growth and decay of a language system within an individual speaker.

Criticizing the theory of Universal Grammar for being based in the reality of the monolingual speaker, the authors consider the concept of Selinker's Interlanguage hypothesis. They adopt a solution suggested by Cook and Grosjean, the concept of the wholistic view of multicompetence. A theory of multilingual proficiency needs to shift from fractionalism (monolingualism) to wholism. (Herdina and Jessner prefer the term 'holism' because they want to emphasize the dynamics of the concept which has not been included in neither Cook's nor Grosjean's wholistic approach). The rare phenomenon of full fluency in both languages (or ambilingualism) need not be considered a prerequisite for a person to be considered a bilingual.

“The biling is not the sum of two complete or incomplete monolinguals; s/he rather has a specific linguistic configuration characterised by the constant interaction and co-existence of the two languages involved” (p. 59).

The authors present a long list of benefits from multilingualism:

- improved metacognitive strategies (the learner's experience of learning how to learn a language) and an enhanced level of metalinguistic awareness;
- positive crosslinguistic relationships for pragmatic or conversationally-oriented language abilities;
- increased literacy-related abilities;
- cognitive flexibility, divergent thinking, creativity, originality; multilinguals differ in thinking styles from their monolingual counterparts;
- metapragmatic and sociocultural awareness, crosscultural pragmatics, interactional competence, communicative sensitivity;
- the facilitative nature of even partial competence and metalinguistic knowledge for further language learning.

Confusions in terminology and hypotheses are clarified:

1) In cases where the L1 is no longer the dominant language, but is replaced by L2 as the dominant language, it is helpful to discuss primary language acquisition rather than first language acquisition.

2) The concepts of sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic variation need to be reconsidered. Multilingual variation is greater when measured in terms of monolingual performance. In contrast, individual variation or uneven performance can also occur in the discourse of native speakers. Language change in the individual results from adjusting one's language system(s) to one's communicative needs.

“[...] we argue that language competence as such should be seen as neither an absolute nor invariable state, but as an attainable goal, both for native (!) and non-native speakers. ... This view implies that language itself is in constant flow, and so are the language systems in a multilingual, depending on the various factors involved in the language acquisition process” (pp. 74 f.).

Thus, the authors propose a dynamic model of multilingualism, introducing the reader to dynamic systems approaches and chaos theory, where everything affects everything else. This model has two key factors:

- gradual language loss, which can take place in normal and healthy monolingual speakers in the form of intrapersonal (systematic) variation;
- language maintenance, which is required to guarantee homeostasis within a linguistic system (i.e., dynamic steady state), and which will increase with the accumulation of linguistic knowledge.

Factors that slow down language growth are interference and language maintenance. The general language effort is a function of language acquisition effort and language maintenance effort. Whereas one can find positive and negative growth, there is a general stability of the whole system. The various stages illustrated by numerous graphs to help the reader understand concepts. Communicative needs (effective and perceived) are central to the language systems. Personal or psychosocial factors affecting multilingual proficiency include motivation, multilingual aptitude / metalinguistic abilities, perceived language competence, self-esteem, anxiety, and language acquisition progress.

Herdina and Jessner suggest that their theories can be applied to the area of multilingual education for the following reasons:

- to overcome the belief that bilingualism is nothing more than a handicap;
- to serve as a missing link between language education and linguistics in the development of new language teaching concepts;
- to provide a psycholinguistic basis for applied research;
- to support the goals of multilingual education by providing a linguistic model to explain the complexity and problems of multilingualism.

Even partial competence in a particular language is meaningful because it brings to bear metalinguistic knowledge and skills to form part of a multiple competence.

“[...] having to deal with more than one language at a time does not mean that a person’s cognitive resources are divided and therefore reduced [...]” (p. 160).

To enhance language learning, the authors argue, language maintenance needs to be reserved a bigger part in the classroom and should include testing methods and teaching materials concentrating on language maintenance skills.

“Multilingualism as such is obviously also a significant political issue. A useful effect of the adoption of a dynamic model of multilingualism might well be the realisation of the need to revise politically comfortable, but scientifically doubtful prejudices and to replace these by a more differentiated view of language acquisition and language use in a multicultural and multilingual (global) society” (p. 161).

DMM would be of interest to researchers in second language acquisition, bilingualism and multilingualism, cognitive linguistics, dynamic systems theory, research methodology, language planners, administrators, and other professionals. This book would be useful for more advanced students of linguistics, psycholinguistics and applied linguistics. It should become an indispensable reference point on any discussion of multilingualism. DMM is a very important and timely addition to the literature.

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Reference

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