

forward to a democratic system, as well as the powerful military. The savagery of colonialism and the special aim of France to integrate Algeria within a European, Christian and 'democratic' framework have added to the severity of the reaction and the bitterness of the fight with Islamic fundamentalists – moderation and compromise are out of the question, and language planning is extremely controversial. Tunisia is in a different position again: as with India and English, French is war booty and so language policy, officially one of Arabisation, is less absolute than elsewhere in North Africa.

Overall, this collection is valuable. It brings together a number of studies of *francophonie*, venturing into areas that are

sometimes less studied. All the chapters clearly show the centrality of the language question to political futures. They also make it quite clear that French carries very different symbolic weight across the world. For some, it is representative of democratic values to be defended against the attacks of religious fundamentalisms or barbarians at the gate: civilisation must be defended, usually through erecting barriers. For others, protecting standard French is a matter of dominance. The choices that are made, and the ideologies that support and direct the policies, have clear consequences.

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First Language Acquisition

Eve Clark. New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Pp. xviii + 515. ISBN 0-521-62003-1 (hbk): \$90.00. ISBN 0-521-62997-7 (pbk): \$32.00.

First Language Acquisition deals with the social-pragmatic perspective on acquiring a first language, as well as with its cognitive foundations. Clark emphasises how children learn from adult usage and she focuses on continuity in development. She examines current topics, including conceptual representation, stages of learning, child bilingualism, the nature – nurture debate, the critical-period hypothesis and language specialisation. The book has an introduction and four substantive sections.

The first section begins with a review of the information children receive from adults. It examines how the speech stream is analysed, the mapping between words and meaning, and how children best use language to express their feelings and intentions. Clark also analyses the acquisition of markings of social distinctions, the general course and rate of vocabulary acquisition, the importance of representa-

tional gestures during the earliest stages of acquisition, and differences and similarities between adult and child language use. There is also a thorough review of early language interaction and the role of conversational settings and pragmatic knowledge in the acquisition of meaning. The analysis of the strategies children use to cope with new words, sounds and concepts is particularly strong.

In Part 2, Clark focuses on the construction of more elaborate adult-like communicative forms and syntactic structures. She reviews the different theories dealing with issues such as word and gesture combinations, the coining of new words, the emergence of multiword combinations and the omission of the subject. Clark also explores how children add complexity within the clause (conventional ways for marking utterances as questions and negatives, the mapping of argument roles onto grammatical relations, and so on). At the end of this section, she elaborates on combining clauses through subordination and other syntactic tools, as well on the coining of words through compounding and derivation. This part is more difficult to follow without a solid background in linguistics and first-language-acquisition theory.

Part 3 addresses social factors, skills and registers needed for effective communication. It also examines child bilingualism and such phenomena as code-mixing and dialect acquisition. Clark defends the position that bilingual children start with two different systems rather than with one unified grammar, and attributes the occurrence of codemixing to language dominance. She concludes here by discussing the social dimensions of language choice.

Finally, Part 4 examines the biological specialisation of language and the mechanisms needed for its acquisition. The author discusses the heated nature–nurture debate and argues against an innate language-learning mechanism.

A positive feature of the book is the inclusion of cross-linguistic data and the integration of seminal research. I would have appreciated, however, the incorporation of more recent insights and research, particularly in the treatment of important issues such as the nature–nurture debate. Another strength is that – although Clark's position is a sociolinguistic one – her stance is not tied to a specific theory. For instance, on the subject drop issue, she presents Hyam's pro-drop parameter theory, Pinker's performance limitation and Gerken's prosodic explanation, as well as a discourse-centred explanation based on the work of du Bois.

This theoretical neutrality is not evident throughout all chapters, however, and at times the author presents the sociocultural perspective as the only valid one, becoming rather selective with her references. For instance, while analysing bilingual acquisition, Clark asserts that codemixing could be due to grammatical deficits, greater language complexity, social-interactional factors – the formality or familiarity of the setting and addressee – or perhaps it is just a reproduction of patterns of communication children are exposed to in their bilingual community. However, she does not account for the fact that codemixing (in both children and adults) is also a grammatically rule-governed linguistic behaviour, and not just the result of language deficiency or sociopragmatic causes. As a matter of fact, many argue that, rather than

reflecting language 'deficits' (lexical, syntactical or morphological), codemixing is a signal of bilingual ability.

Clark argues against Chomsky's innateness position, and for the sociolinguistic approach to child-directed speech, by considering 'just how adults *do* speak to children' (p. 28). She states that child-directed speech is well tailored, highly grammatical in form, and virtually free of errors – it is sufficient, therefore, to account for language acquisition without any pre-wired mechanism (specifically for syntax). However, Clark does not elaborate on the view that, even if the utterances children receive are highly grammatical, they are often misparsed and misperceived by them – and this is equivalent to ungrammatical adult utterance. Furthermore, Clark universalises a concept that many consider to be culturally specific, and one that overlooks individual and contextual differences. Although the author does address cross-linguistic differences in her description of child-directed speech, she considers it essential for successful first-language acquisition.

Some readers may find the chapter sequence problematic. From the beginning of the book, for instance, the author makes reference to innate assumptions in language acquisition, but it is not until the last section that Clark deals directly with the innateness debate and important related issues.

First Language Acquisition rightly calls for further research on the sociolinguistic, psychological and cognitive processes involved in first-language acquisition. While I would have liked a more balanced analysis of some issues, this is a very good book, and it will certainly stimulate empirical investigation. While well written and covering an interesting range of phenomena, the book is best directed to graduate students and established scholars; for those with little background in linguistic theory and language acquisition, it might prove rather challenging (effective summaries at the end of the chapters do help, though).

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