Book Reviews

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The beauty of edited volumes is their potential to achieve synergism in bringing together diverse work on a significant topic – not just to create a coherent collection of research. _Literacy in African American communities_ succeeds on all fronts. In presenting a broad view of literacy-related practices, the volume evokes a variable African American community that is invisible (or at least hazy) in many schools. Without deep knowledge of the linguistic, cultural, historical, and political contexts for literacy in the community, the schools and university programs that prepare professionals cannot hope to overcome the deficit perspective of cultural and linguistic differences that still drives assessment and instruction to a large degree.

Two well-crafted, critical integrative summaries of research on African American students’ reading (by Kamhi and Laing and by Washington and Craig) provide a backdrop for the other chapters. Kamhi and Laing focus on studies of children’s early literacy experiences. They point out that these experiences vary considerably but that children “from low-SES homes are more likely to have fewer literacy experiences and lower levels of performance on measures of language and phoneme awareness” (p. 137). To understand the performance differential, more study of phonological awareness in African American children is necessary. (Their chapter predates reports of Labov & Baker’s, 2001, recent work on this topic). To support reading development, Kamhi and Laing call for implementation of educational policies and practices addressing principles outlined by Strickland (1994, e.g., providing literacy programs that value children’s knowledge and build on their language and cultures), as well as more attention to language and reading in the preparation of teachers (discussed in detail in Adger, Snow, & Christian, in press).

Washington and Craig discuss six factors found to influence the reading and academic achievement of African American students. For example, with respect to home literacy environments, they contend that “research with African American families is complicated by the failure to distinguish between cultural values and practices” (p. 154). It can be assumed that most parents want their children to succeed academically and become proficient readers, but it cannot be assumed that these shared values “are manifested as shared practices” (p. 154). Thus, book reading and the number of books in the home may not reflect the value placed on literacy in African American families. The chapter outlines

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other problems with earlier research methodology and the sort of research that needs to be done.

A number of the chapters, including both these reviews, mention the possible role of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), which has often been proposed as an explanation for differential reading performance. Washington and Craig summarize research showing that the phonology of AAVE does not interfere with comprehension or learning sound–symbol correspondence, but instead morphosyntactic features influence oral reading. Their own work shows that dialect diversity in preschool and kindergarten predicts reading outcomes at grades 3 and 4. Baugh also addresses AAVE, outlining its sociocultural and linguistic history, and Le Moine addresses adding Standard English as a second dialect for AAVE speakers.

Other dimensions of oral language and their connection to print literacy are prominent in the collection. In the first chapter Qualls examines verbal literacy as one of many senses in which the term *literacy* is used. She points out that African American communities expect their members to have competence in speech activities associated with an oral tradition that contrasts with those of other groups. This tradition, which stresses “implicit language, multiple meanings, and ambiguity as an important means of communication” (p. 9), conflicts with contemporary notions of academic literacy. This oral tradition has been identified with African origins; but, as Baugh notes in the book’s final chapter, its African American iteration developed within a context of language dislocation as slaves were yanked from their linguistic heritages and thrown into situations that forced them to improvise linguistically. At the same time, literacy was prohibited for them. Thus, the language and literacy heritage of African Americans has a very different basis than that of other groups who came to this continent at about the same time – one that education does not adequately recognize.

Moss’ chapter on literacy in African American churches provides a nice account of how the African American oral tradition relates to text contemporarily and how this cultural model may conflict with the schools’ notions of literacy. Using ethnographic data from three churches with different worship styles, Moss argues that the pastor exemplifies the literate person. Sermons draw their strength in part from the pastor’s ability to use both Standard English and AAVE appropriately, to invoke shared cultural knowledge and experience (especially that associated with the struggle against oppression; see Rickford & Rickford, 2000), and to lead the congregation in cocreating the text through call and response. These dimensions of expert oral performance are starkly at odds with the oral language conventions of many classrooms (although they match the practices of some African American teachers; Foster & Peele, 2000). In some churches, Moss shows, the meaning of text contrasts with the meaning valued in school. The primary text, the Bible, may be viewed as having a fixed meaning. Although that view is not absent from school, there is also a strong emphasis on text interpretation. This chapter serves to explicate community or school contrasts, but it also reminds the reader that the oral and literate traditions of African American communities serve a positive institutional role.

The chapter by Bloome, Champion, Katz, Morton, and Muldrow reports early findings from research using anthropological and sociolinguistic methods to
study the interweaving of spoken and written narrative in African American preschool children. They found that young children used stories for a range of social ends and developed a repertoire of narrative styles and structures. Using the stories they heard told and read in their classrooms and combining them with real and imagined events, the children organized stories not only around resolving problems but also around raising moral issues. However, their stories were more about style than about content and more oriented toward claiming social positions and identities for themselves than to relating events. The researchers conclude that children “make themselves into story-tellers given the material resources and opportunities to do so through interactions with adults and peers” (p. 73). The researchers acknowledge that their findings are not necessarily specific to African American students, but their study provides data on narrative development in that population that had not been available previously.

It is impossible to read far into this book without demanding to know what schools can do to attack the inequities that have dogged the literacy development of many African American students. Le Moine’s chapter addresses this question at length, but other chapters also make the point that African American students belong to communities of rich language and literacy traditions that provide the foundation on which to build what Moss calls the “essayist academic model of literate text.” This construction is not the job of schools alone, as Scott and Marcus observe, but rather one to which schools, researchers, and homes should contribute more interactively than is usually the case. One of the home literacy events for schools to mine is playing school, which supports emergent literacy. This practice is indexed in Hammer’s chapter on early literacy practices in low and middle-class African American homes (although the writer does not remark on it), when a lower class mother calls her child to “do a little lesson” with her (p. 30).

This book is very rich. In the brief introduction Harris points out that “the chapters . . . bring together personal, historical, developmental, and cross-disciplinary vantage points from which to view the influences of cultural socialization on literacy values and practices among many African Americans” (p. xxv). They do that collectively and individually: for example, both Baugh’s and Le Moine’s chapters combine accounts of personal and professional experience, research, and recommendations for policy and practice. Moreover, the book balances the focus on children’s literacy with three chapters on adult literacy.

The volume is also very timely, in view of increased attention to literacy in the United States, on top of the standards and accountability movement that promises to improve education for all children. As the pressure builds to improve test scores, it is crucial to resist focusing solely on the numbers. The relatively low literacy scores for African American students are real, but they do not reveal everything that educators and others need to know about reading and African Americans. This book makes that point very clearly.

REFERENCES
Since the late 1980s, the Child Language Data Exchange System (CHILDES) has defined the state of the art of collection, analysis, archiving, and data sharing of transcriptions of children’s language. Starting from scratch in 1987, Brian MacWhinney, along with many other leaders in child language, developed highly useful tools for the computerization of transcripts and their analysis. I have used the transcription conventions and analysis programs since 1989 and have seen the system evolve from a simple DOS-based program to one that handles much broader and more complex analyses within more user-friendly Windows and Macintosh platforms. This latest (third) edition of the manual that accompanies the CHILDES system reflects a more stable version of the Conventions for Human Analysis of Transcripts (CHAT) and Child Language Analysis (CLAN) programs than prior editions, which felt like works in progress. This version is written as a finished product with procedures and programs that have settled down into stable patterns of operation.

So what has changed since the second (1995) edition? The most obvious change is the size of the manual, which is now in two volumes, expanded from a total of 424 pages to 762 pages. The greatest quantitative change is in the CHILDES Database section, which has grown from 140 to 413 pages and is now in its own volume. But the greatest qualitative shift is found in the CHAT and CLAN sections of the manual.

The CHAT section has been substantially updated and enhanced. One major shift is in the inclusion of new material on marking CHAT transcripts from digitized audio- and videotape. As personal computers handle more and more sophisticated input and processing, MacWhinney et al. stay on top of the available technologies, their applications to child language study, and the adjustments to the whole CHILDES system as a result. The system is now entirely Windows or Macintosh based and has new capabilities for time alignment of transcripts with either audio or video input.

The introductory material in the manual’s CHAT section has been substantially rewritten and expanded to place the CHILDES system in historical and

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theoretical context. This section now contains new material on the history of child language study; transcribing signed language using the Berkeley Transcription System (developed by Dan Slobin, Nina Hoiting, and colleagues); code switching and voice switching; new CHAT adaptations for disfluent speakers; and specific language situations used frequently by researchers, including book readings, elicited narratives, and written language.

Conventions for phonological transcription and coding are altered. Henry Rogers’ IPAPhon font is now available for use in transcripts that require more sophisticated phonological analysis, and use of the PHONASCII system is dropped from the CHAT manual. A new UNIBET system is adopted (replacing an older one developed by CHILDES); the SAMPA system (Gibbon, Moore, & Winski, 1997) employs consonant and vowel symbols that are consistent across languages, such as English, Dutch, German, French, Japanese, Portuguese, and Spanish. Both IPAPhon and SAMPA are more powerful and versatile and should improve the study of phonology in the CHILDES system.

The new edition of the CHILDES manual includes an update on the use of the various editors available. The entire manual now assumes the use of Coder’s Edition (CED) as the text editor for transcripts. The enhanced description of CED is much clearer than previous versions and also adds two new capabilities, Video Mode (similar to Sonic Mode for linking the transcript file to a digitized sound file) and CA Mode. CA mode is intended for use for Conversational Analysis (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). This mode allows the user to produce and edit transcript files for CA and then analyze them with CLAN programs.

The CLAN section of the manual reflects the stabilization of the CLAN programs and commands, and there are relatively few changes to the program and option descriptions themselves. However, there is now an underlying assumption that command lines are now produced by dialogue boxes in Windows or Macintosh format. The CHECK program is enhanced and the manual’s discussion of its use is much expanded and more detailed, because of the greater complexity of CHAT conventions. In the MOR program there are new rules added to the rules file (drules) and a new interactive mode.

Some new programs are added to CLAN. POST, developed by Christophe Parisse, includes three programs that automatically disambiguate the output of MOR. Another important new program included is VOCD, which calculates vocabulary diversity, written by Gerard McKee. MAKEDATE converts files from one form (Mac, Unix, or DOS) to another of these three forms. The new FREQPOS program, a variant of the FREQ program, tracks the frequencies of the positions of the words (initial, final, or other) in utterances within FREQ. The program TIMEDUR records the duration of overlaps and pauses in conversations, working in conjunction with Sonic CHAT. A time-saving addition is ID, which creates ID lines at the beginning of transcripts based on the information in the header. This ID follows a new standardized format for all ID lines in the CHILDES Database files.

The CLAN section of the manual includes a new tutorial for using CED and CLAN that covers downloading, installing, and starting CLAN, as well as issuing commands through dialogue boxes. The tutorial contains sample runs of
FREQ, MLU, GEM, KWAL, and COMBO; and the manual also provides some practice exercises with the programs.

The Database volume of the manual is expanded with at least 40 new data sources in English, Dutch, German, Hebrew, Catalan Spanish, French, European Portuguese, Irish, Welsh, Cantonese, Mandarin, Russian, and Polish. There are additional bilingual corpora, clinical corpora, and narrative corpora. In this section, there is greater detail on guidelines for the acknowledgment of sources and for dealing with the confidentiality of study participants. The latter issue has been raised by Institutional Review Boards for the protection of human participants; how is participant confidentiality protected when the data are later released to a data dissemination system like CHILDES? In this edition of the CHILDES manual, MacWhinney lists nine levels of confidentiality possible, from fully public to no data sharing at all. However, these levels are not applied in the description of each corpus, so it is not clear what procedures for protection of human participants have been, and should be, applied in each corpus. For data collected prior to the current U.S. human subjects protection rules, it remains an open question: did the participants and/or their parents give permission for their transcripts to be widely disseminated? Twenty years ago we did not anticipate such data-sharing systems. MacWhinney deals with this by assuming that the researchers who have made their transcripts publicly available have used appropriate safeguards (such as the use of pseudonyms or going back to the subjects to get explicit permission) and this procedure is generally sufficient to protect confidentiality. This is probably appropriate for the existing corpora. I would argue, however, that future additions to the database must seek explicit permission from participants or their parents to release the transcripts for databases like CHILDES in the informed consent procedure.

This third edition of the CHILDES Project manual is well worth the efforts of the project team and the expense to the user. The manual is reorganized and substantive sections rewritten in a straightforward fashion; it reads less like a computer manual and more like a researcher’s guide. It is more consistent in its approach to explaining the programs and conventions, matching the more seamless form of the system itself. CHILDES has reached maturity in both its sophistication as a language analysis tool and its user friendliness. It has settled down into a remarkably consistent and versatile system; and its manual has similarly matured in its usefulness, clarity, and breadth of application. MacWhinney and his collaborators are to be congratulated for their responsiveness to the needs of researchers and continued collaborative approach to maintaining the manual and the entire project.

REFERENCES

Diane E. Beals
University of Tulsa

Laurence Leonard is one of the most prolific and well-respected researchers in the area of specific language impairment (SLI) in children, and he is well qualified to write a book surveying the topic. SLI is a disorder of unknown origin, which appears to have a genetic component, causing delays and disorders of language development in children of normal nonverbal intelligence with no significant medical, emotional, or sensory deficits. The primary purpose of this book is to provide a comprehensive review of research in the field of SLI, and Leonard has the minute knowledge necessary to succeed at the task. The coverage in the book reaches back to the earliest nineteenth-century descriptions of children who fit the profile and then moves forward quickly to the massive literature that has accumulated on the topic in the last 20 years. Following the introductory historical and definitional section, Leonard goes on to describe the nature of the linguistic impairment in SLI, including important cross-linguistic accounts and nonlinguistic cognitive issues. The book also covers hypotheses of causation, in a “nature versus nurture” section, and clinical issues of assessment and intervention. Part V, on theory, may be of most interest to psycholinguists who are not language disorders specialists. Overall, there is no doubt that this book is both an excellent introduction for those unfamiliar with SLI and a welcome overview and resource for experts. Leonard’s knowledge is encyclopedic, his presentation erudite, and his grasp of detail unfailingly impressive.

Leonard’s own description of his project is rather modest: to “provide the kind of information about specific language impairment that news accounts probably can’t provide” (p. vii). This quote is revealing of the tone of the book – self-effacing to a fault. Of course, news accounts cannot possibly provide detailed expositions of complex theoretical positions that even experts need time to digest! This quote may lead the reader to falsely imagine that Leonard’s intent is to write a crossover, popularized account. On the contrary, one possible criticism of this clearly praiseworthy work of scholarship is that he does not try to be popular enough. This book covers a staggering amount of ground with clarity and precision. Anyone researching this topic needs to read this book, and perhaps that is all a reader of this review needs to know. It provides a central resource unparalleled in the field. However, there are faults in the book that detract from its ability to succeed as more than an encyclopedia of SLI. These faults are perhaps best characterized as stylistic.

One way to get people excited over the arcana of one’s subfield is to take on controversy headlong, retailing a trenchant view of weaknesses in the work of scholars with whom one disagrees. Leonard does not take that route, instead preserving, at all times, a careful and cautious demeanor. His commitment to accessible prose and fairness leads to a strenuous avoidance of any hint of stringency in retailing views he does not share. The shortcomings in others’ theories are carefully examined; but readers must be alert to discover Leonard’s own theories, which are presented in curiously muffled tones. This rhetorical stance can be seen as a refreshing change from writing on language issues in which
straw figures are vigorously knocked about and key elements of opponents’ arguments are misinterpreted or ignored. Leonard never commits these sins, and the reader should be grateful for this. In this light, perhaps it is carping to wish for just a bit more glee when listing fatal flaws in opposing lines of work. Yet rhetorical flourishes do serve a purpose, in that they can help neophytes orient themselves to an unfamiliar body of work. Although Leonard’s cautious prose is evident throughout the book, it is in the theory section that a bit of stridency might have been rhetorically useful in presenting his argument. Despite the catholic and lucid coverage, readers who have not been following the debates dealing with the theoretical issues raised in Chapters 11 and 12 may not understand the situation.

In Chapter 5 Leonard presents an analysis of one of the most intractable problems in SLI: the relation between language and cognition. Most syndromes that are associated with language difficulties arise from conditions that result in language impairment as one of many effects. There are syndromes with clear physical correlates that virtually always result in language impairments, such as Down syndrome. Other syndromes, such as autism, may lack biomedical diagnostic protocols, and instead diagnosis turns on the presence of clusters of behavioral features. But even these syndromes have language issues as a mere piece of the puzzle. In the case of SLI, the language piece is the only piece – sort of. And it is the “sort of” qualifier that leads to possibly the most difficult issue in the field – how best to identify which children have impairments affecting only language. It turns out that children with SLI tend to have slightly lower nonverbal IQs than controls (although still within the normal range). Other differences have also been noted, including slight motor and perceptual differences compared to controls. The disorder itself is defined using a discrepancy model that compares IQ with language functioning, usually using mean length of utterance and formal language tests. The familiar objections to the validity of IQ testing are present in a particularly virulent form in the realm of formal language testing. There are many language tests, none of which was designed to be co-normed with IQ tests and all of which suffer from various psychometric flaws (McCauley & Swisher, 1984; Plante & Vance, 1994). Thus, there are foundational issues in the identification of the disorder that remain unresolved. Leonard is comprehensive in his discussion of these problems, but he fails to mount a defense to the foundational challenges posed by issues of identification.

In contrast to the somewhat disappointing handling of issues related to language testing, Leonard’s discussion of issues raised by IQ is subtle and penetrating. He identifies two paradoxes and labels them “little” and “big.” The little paradox arises from the finding that children with SLI have known deficits in mental representation and hypothesis testing. How then can they score within normal limits on IQ tests? The answer is that most items on tests for young children do not heavily rely on these areas of cognition. But this then leads to the big paradox: that language itself is required for many so-called nonverbal tasks, and how then can they fail to show cognitive impairment? The answer to this conundrum is that, in fact, older children with SLI have been shown in several studies to exhibit a decline in IQ. Issues related to IQ are generally underaddressed within the field, and Leonard does us a service by taking another
look at the complexity of the relation between linguistic and cognitive functioning.

Leonard’s presentation of theories of SLI follows the issues of language and cognition into territory familiar to language researchers. In work on SLI, as in other language acquisition research, nativist and domain-specific linguistic accounts compete with domain general processing views. Mainstream linguistics has occasionally taken an interest in clinical populations, for example, Jakobsonian language theories drawing on aphasia (Jakobson & Halle, 1975) and the famous case of Genie (Curtiss, 1977). An impetus to the rise of interest in SLI came from modular accounts of language and its acquisition (Fodor, 1983), which led to theories of disorders that might exhibit selective impairment of modular faculties (Bellugi, Marks, Bihrl, & Sabo, 1993; Smith & Tsimpli, 1995). SLI was among the syndromes held to support generative linguistic theory, in that it appears to show the existence of a modular language faculty that can be selectively impaired (Rice, 1994).

In summarizing the strengths of generative linguistic accounts, Leonard praises their precision in generating and testing predictions. Thus, the Extended Optional Infinitive account (see, e.g., Rice, Wexler, Marquis, & Hershberger, 2000) is held to derive strength from the fact that it provides a unified grammatical framework to account for apparently disparate grammatical deficits. A genetic impairment in the ability to learn the rules associated with that category is then postulated and offered as an explanation for linguistic deficits in SLI. Leonard perhaps overstates the case for precision, in that a major weakness of such predictions is their reliance on one particular grammatical framework. Because of the influence of modular theories, the vast majority of linguistically influenced work in SLI has been conducted within the confines of generative linguistics. Grammatical models are subject to change (and generative grammars, while maintaining certain core features, have undergone radical change at regular intervals over the past 4 decades). This type of flux leaves these accounts open to attack by competing models of grammar. It also leaves them vulnerable to irrelevancy if the formalisms postulated become outdated.

It would enrich the literature of SLI if alternative grammatical accounts were considered explicitly. To some extent, Leonard’s discussion of processing accounts of SLI postulated under versions of the competition model (Bates & MacWhinney, 1987) is a step in this direction. MacWhinney (1985) applied the competition model to known facts in the patterning of morphosyntactic development in Hungarian. Such a model, or an emergent descendant (MacWhinney, 1999), might be usefully applied to predicting linguistic patterning of children with impairments. There is a recent trend in the SLI literature to compare predictions made by domain general processing and nativist linguistic theories (e.g., Rice et al., 2000; Rice, Wexler, & Redmond, 1999). However, comparisons of alternative linguistic accounts are not made. For example, one processing account, the surface hypothesis (Leonard, 1989), holds that language impairment stems from subtle perceptual difficulties that impede the comprehension of English morphology. Leonard presents this and other processing views as the main competitors to nativist theories of SLI. Yet many other potential sources of difficulty for children with subtle language difficulties exist, including input
frequency, regularity of forms, and the pragmatic importance and functional load of morphemes. In functionalist approaches to language development, phonetic substance plays a role but is only one element in a complex mix. These alternative views of complexity over and above phonetic issues have been largely ignored in the debates over nativist versus processing accounts. Leonard himself has been one of the few in the field of developmental language disorders to discuss nongenerative approaches to language and their relevance for children with disorders (Leonard & Fey, 1991). In *Children with specific language impairment*, however, Leonard missed an opportunity to make direct theoretical comparisons. Such comparisons would help situate the disorders literature within the broader universe of language study. A further argument for the importance of alternative grammatical accounts lies in the main weakness that Leonard finds in the current generatively based linguistic theories of SLI; lack of congruence with findings in languages other than English.

Despite his discussion of critical gaps in generative theories of SLI, Leonard’s review of the evidence leads him in the book’s last chapter to conclude that the known facts of SLI remain consistent with this theory. However, he argues that the facts are also consistent with processing accounts; careful reading will reveal that Leonard finds the latter approach to be the more promising. Aside from his avoidance of issues relevant to processing-based linguistic theory, his account of the evidence in favor of processing theories is as thorough as the rest of the book, although a slightly off-note is struck by the penultimate chapter. In Chapter 13 Leonard examines Paula Tallal’s theory that children with language impairments have difficulty perceiving brief acoustic events. This deficiency, in turn, causes deficits in their ability to form correct linguistic representations. In this account the innate linguistic ability of the children is seen as intact, and therefore intervention targeted at perceptual deficits is argued to have the potential to normalize functioning (Tallal, Miller, Bedi, Wang, & Nagarajan, 1996). The article by Tallal et al. (1996) outlines positive results from a program of intervention designed to improve the perception of brief acoustic events. A problem for this theory is that there is evidence that children with SLI and children who are developing normally do not differ in their ability to perceive brief acoustic events (Nittrouer, 1999), casting doubt on the rationale for the therapy offered, if not necessarily on its effectiveness. Although it is unfair to expect that this book would have been able to anticipate these challenges, the decision to highlight this theory over others may date the work unduly in the near future.

In discussing the theoretical controversies of the field, Leonard carefully sets up the issues related to cognition and language. Perhaps because he is trying to be fair to all interested parties, he leaves the scene of his carefully built argument to look at other issues. We do not return to the link between cognition and language until after a presentation of nativist linguist theories. This has the unfortunate result of obscuring the main thrust of Leonard’s argument and the aspect of the book that has the most interest for psycholinguistics as a whole. *Children with specific language impairment* is an important contribution to the literature that argues against modular, syntactically based accounts of language acquisition and its disorders. It makes a strong case for linking language and cognition, both at a bottom-up, perceptual level and from a neo-Whorfian per-
spective, in that Leonard holds that a lack of language results in cognitive restrictions. It may be that I have dwelt overmuch on the rhetorical issues that obscure this important argument. Otherwise, the work has few faults, and it deserves a readership far beyond a narrow audience of specialists in language disorders.

REFERENCES

Lynne E. Hewitt
Bowling Green State University