
This is a courageous book. Published as the author’s doctoral thesis, this work strives retrospectively to “determine the significance of age in the acquisition of a second language” (p. 26). It has explicit interdisciplinary ambitions to integrate concepts and practices from various disciplines in which bilingual development is studied: notably, sociocultural theory, developmental psychology, psycholinguistics, text linguistics, and pragmatics. These multifaceted theoretical aims are anchored in an equally broad empirical ground, drawing on various types of data. Not surprisingly, the result is a theoretically intriguing, yet methodologically puzzling, approach to the study of bilingualism and second language acquisition.

The volume consists of six papers, previously published in different journals and conference reports, preceded by an introductory part which provides the general rationale of the studies. In addition, the thesis includes a summary and discussion of the studies as well as new data that update a few of the ideas presented in the six papers. Although organized chronologically in the book, for the purposes of the present review, the six publications will be dealt with in what seems to me the most coherent order.

The theoretical framework of the thesis is outlined in the first two studies entitled “Sign and the Development of Bilingualism in Ontogenesis” (Study 1) and “On Typologies of Bilingualism” (Study 2). The latter paper was published in Swedish (with an English abstract) and coauthored by Kristiina Sipponen. As part of the historical background of the thesis, Study 2 begins with a comprehensive presentation of two of the most well-known classic studies on the psychology of bilingualism: namely, the linguistic case descriptions reported by Ronjat (1913) and the psycholinguistic theory advanced by Epstein (1915). Presumably due to rather different approaches, the two investigations arrived at almost diametrically opposite conclusions with regard to early bilingual development. Whereas Ronjat’s detailed description of his son Louis’s parallel acquisition of German and French highlighted the positive effects of learning two languages during childhood, Epstein derived from his observations a theory of the relation between thought and language from which it follows that the native language must be learned prior to the foreign one. Thus, according to Epstein, the premature acquisition of a L2 will hamper L1 development and, as a consequence, the child’s intellectual growth in general. Taken together, these two studies established the framework for much of the research on bilingual development that has followed. In the next section of the paper, the authors briefly present some of the most prominent typologies of bilingualism that have evolved within this
framework: for example, Weinreich’s (1979) distinction between coordinative, compound, and subordinative bilingualism, which is based on the notion of different representations of the signifier and signified; Ervin and Osgood’s (1954) distinction between coordinate and compound bilingualism, which has generated much research; Lamendella’s (1977) distinction between primary and nonprimary bilingualism, which is based on the child’s neurological maturation; McLaughlin’s (1978) division into simultaneous and successive bilingual development, which is anchored in Lenneberg’s (1967) studies on cortical lateralization; and, finally, the six typologies presented by Hamers and Blanc (1989), each of which is based on different criteria (language competence; cognitive organization; age of acquisition; language distribution in the community at large; the relative status of each language; and the relation of each language to identity). Summing up, Kuure and Sipponen conclude that the only point of agreement among these typologies concerns the role of age (of initial L2 acquisition) in the bilingual child’s linguistic and intellectual development. However, this only serves to support the assumption that age does matter. The specific age ranges for optimal bilingual development vary according to the typology, depending on the theoretical basis of each approach.

Thus, stressing the need for an integration of the aspects that are central in the previous typologies (i.e., mental representations, the role of age in acquisition, and the development of sign in ontogenesis), the authors advocate the semiotic–genetic model advanced in Study 1. Here, Kuure draws on Vygotsky’s developmental work on sign in ontogenesis (1978), which describes the transition of signs from signal to symbol during the preschool years, as well as his lecture on the role of play in this development (Vygotsky, 1982). In this lecture, Vygotsky arrives at three essential conclusions concerning the nature and development of language: that language is “a socially and culturally determined phenomenon . . .,” “a system of signs which undergo transformations in the course of ontogenetic development . . .,” and “a psychological phenomenon which must be studied through consideration of the developmental stages leading to its acquisition by a human child” (p. 114). These ideas are combined together with a few of the many typologies of bilingualism discussed in Study 2 – notably, those of Epstein (1915), Weinreich (1979), and McLaughlin (1978). The result is a novel typology of bilingualism in which the categories of simultaneous, successive, and subordinative bilingualism are combined with three age categories (1–2, 3–6, and 7), roughly representing the three phases in the development of sign (i.e., signal, intermediate, and symbol) proposed by Vygotsky (1982). The synthesis works well on the level of theory, and the author specifies three operational criteria that determine the type of bilingualism developed: (a) the social environment in which the languages are learned; (b) the age of acquisition of the L2; and (c) “the relative dominance of one language over the other in various types of social activity” (p. 115) or what the author refers to as the “semiotic factor.” Thus, according to this model, a child who grows up with two parents who speak different L1s to the child from the earliest phases of language acquisition and who grows up in a community where the everyday activities are not clearly dominated by either language is considered simultaneously bilingual. In contrast, a successively bilingual child typically grows up in
a monolingual home and acquires the L2 between the ages of 3 and 6 years (i.e., during the intermediate phase in the semiotic development). Although most everyday activities would be dominated by the L1, the L2 would be used frequently and independently (e.g., with peers or adults who are native speakers of the L2). Finally, in the case of subordinative bilingualism, the home is typically monolingual, and the L2 is the language of the school, which is learned through the L1 after the age of 6 (i.e., in the mature symbol phase of the child’s semiotic development). The author points out that the classification represents these three types of bilingualism “in their abstract, generalized and idealized ‘pure’ forms” (p. 116). Indeed, it seems unlikely that all of the children participating in the empirical studies of this thesis would fulfill these criteria.

With this theoretical background, Kuure sets out to “discover the traces of the past”: that is, to look for effects of L2 acquisition age in children’s language use. To this end, he draws on various language data, such as written essays (Studies 4 and 6), elicited speech data (Study 3), and tests of grammatical competence (referred in Study 3), as well as interview data in which parents and teachers were asked to assess background information regarding patterns of language use and preferences, school situation, etc.

The first empirical study to be reviewed (Study 4) was authored by Leena Kuure, Olli Kuure, Ann-Margret Sandbäck, and Anneli Yliherva. Entitled “Dysorthographia and Bilingualism: Case Studies of Swedish as a Second Language,” it reports on a two-stage error analysis of essays written by four teenagers who suffered, to various degrees, from writing difficulties. In addition, discourse-level analyses of cohesion and relative (inter)personal involvement were carried out. Two of the subjects were monolingual speakers of Swedish, and the remaining two teenagers each represented simultaneous and successive acquisition of Finnish and Swedish. Three of the cases were drawn from a large corpus of data made up of 500 school essays. The first phase of the analysis revealed that, while the two bilingual subjects differed notably from their peer groups in the frequency of lexical-grammatical errors committed, the relative distribution of the different types of errors resembled the distribution of each subject’s peer group. The monolingual subjects’ frequency of lexical–grammatical errors, the authors claim, did not differ notably from that of their peer groups. The orthographic errors found in the essays were studied in great detail in the second phase of the analysis. Here, the main differences between the subjects’ error patterns were in phoneme quantity, whereby the bilingual subjects tended to make more errors of reduction or doubling of consonants than the monolinguals did, and quality, whereby the bilinguals made considerably fewer errors of letter alteration. According to the authors’ interpretation, the latter results reflect the bilinguals’ natural opportunities to practice such sound discrimination during childhood. Regarding the textual and interpersonal aspects, there was nothing to suggest that these essays differed from those written by children with no writing disorders.

There is reason to comment on the results of Study 4 as well as the interpretations put forward by its authors. First, it should be pointed out that the four cases are insufficiently described, rendering some of the findings puzzling. What is known, for example, about the writing skills of the Swedish monolingual boy
(Case 4)? How are we to understand the claimed monolinguality of the Swedish-speaking boy who lives in Finland (Case 3)? Is it possible to avoid learning any Finnish whatsoever in such a situation? Second, it should be stressed that, while the authors report the differences between the two monolinguals as minor with respect to lexical–grammatical errors, it is clear in Table 1 that Case 3 (a monolingual boy) committed twice as many lexical errors as the bilingual girl (Case 2) with respect to each subject’s peer group. Thus, the claim that monolingual children “score the lowest frequencies of lexical–grammatical errors” (p. 199), based on previous studies (regrettably, no reference is offered here), is not uniformly supported by Study 4. On the other hand, there is the question of the monolingual status of Case 3; perhaps the boy was bilingual to some degree after all? Finally, it seems unfortunate that no crosslinguistic comparisons were carried out with the bilingual subjects. From a psycholinguistic as well as clinical point of view, it would be very interesting to find out how a writing deficiency such as dysorthographia is reflected in the two languages of the bilingual.

Study 6, “Successive Bilingualism,” reports on an extended error analysis of school essays written by bilinguals between the ages of 14 and 16 years. In all, over 2,700 errors were identified in the 250 essays sampled from the corpus referred to in Study 4 and analyzed according to a classification focusing orthography, lexicon/semantics, morphology, and syntax (in total, 13 subcategories are reported). Few differences were noted between the simultaneous bilinguals and the native speakers of Swedish. Between the simultaneous and successive bilinguals, the largest differences were found in the syntactic domain, although the author maintains that there were “small but consistent differences in vocabulary usage between the native speakers, the simultaneously bilingual group and the successively bilingual group” (p. 395). A closer investigation of the syntactic errors revealed that the largest (but by no means large) differences between the simultaneous and successive bilingual groups were in errors related to syntax—specifically, gender, gender concord, and in/definiteness. The most evident differences with regard to morphology, lexicon/semantics, and syntax were found between the subordinate bilinguals and the remaining three groups. The same can be said of some orthographic errors, such as those pertaining to phoneme marking.

Although not commented on in the paper, it may be noted that the subordinate bilingual subjects made the fewest errors on the reduction or doubling of consonants and made notably fewer errors than the simultaneously bilingual group. Moreover, it is clear that these errors were not more typical of the bilingual groups than of the monolinguals. This pattern is in sharp contrast to the findings of Study 4, where the bilingual subjects committed substantially more of these types of errors (Type I in the second phase of Study 4) than the monolinguals. (Actually, a high frequency of Type I errors was noted for Case 4, but, according to the authors, the figures are misleading as they reflect one particular error that was committed repeatedly throughout the essay.) This incongruency between the two studies suggests that the differences noted in Study 4 should perhaps be attributed to the writing difficulties of the bilingual children rather than to interlingual influence, as was suggested for the successively bilingual girl (Case 2).
Study 5, coauthored by Irma Moilanen and Antero Myhrman, is entitled “Limited Language Proficiency and Types of Bilingualism: Results From Epidemiological Child-Psychiatric-Linguistic Studies and Theoretical Considerations.” The paper presents findings from psychiatric and sociological studies of 320 Finnish school-aged children who had returned to Finland after several years of residence in Sweden. The children were successive bilinguals, with Finnish as their first language according to the present semiotic–genetic typology. Data concerning the children’s psychosomatic symptoms, emotional health, patterns of language use, linguistic proficiency, school achievement, and what is referred to as “circumstances in Sweden and Finland” (p. 243) were obtained by means of parental and teacher assessments as well as by the children’s self-reports. A series of correlation studies based on these data show that, on the whole, the migrant children achieved lower marks than the Finnish control group in both linguistic and nonlinguistic subjects. Furthermore, the migrant children and particularly the boys were reported to display more behavioral problems and seemed more prone to develop psychosomatic as well as depressive symptoms. Closer examinations of these results in relation to patterns of language use revealed that scholastic achievement was conversely correlated to the children’s use of Swedish at home. The children who mostly spoke Swedish to their mothers performed less well than their controls in the language-related subjects and were often placed in a lower grade than was age appropriate. Conversely, the children who spoke Finnish to their mothers most of the time formed an exceptionally successful group with respect to overall school achievement. An underachieving group with respect to linguistic as well as nonlinguistic subjects was identified; its members were children who spoke both languages equally often to their mothers. The children in this group displayed psychosomatic symptoms and mental problems more often than the other migrant children. According to the authors, the situation of these children resembles that of “alexithymia,” where “verbal inability to express one’s emotions leads to non-verbal expressions of stress, including psychosomatic symptoms” (p. 244). The children who had mostly used Swedish with their mothers are described in terms of a “cultural shock,” with resulting psychosomatic disorders on a par with the former group but fewer instances of mental disorders. Finally, the children who mostly spoke Finnish to their mothers seemed extremely successful in adapting to the new environment, displaying fewer mental problems and less antisocial behavior than both migrant groups and their native control group. These results, the authors conclude, demonstrate that the type of bilingualism in general and patterns of language use in particular are reflected in the child’s overall personality, especially in high-stress situations such as (re)migration.

Typical of correlation studies such as this one is the inability to investigate causal relations. Therefore, the benefit of such studies is largely dependent on the plausibility of the suggested explanations for the correlations. Indeed, in the present report, the findings are well anchored in what might be called a holistic view of the bilingual, taking under consideration both developmentally and culturally determined characteristics of the children in the study. However, one important factor seems to have been omitted in the investigations compiled in Study 5 – namely, the socioeconomic status (SES) of the children’s families.
This is rather unfortunate considering that a number of studies have documented the influence of socioeconomic factors on individuals’ mental health (e.g., Ege-land, Pianta, & Ogawa, 1996), general well-being (Rodgers, 1991; van der Lucht & Groothoff, 1995), and scholastic achievement (e.g., Berkowitz & Kel-ler, 1989), all relevant issues for the studies reported here. It seems that socio-economic considerations may be of particular weight when adapting a broad perspective on emigrant situations, perhaps even more so in the case of those emigrants who have chosen to return to their home countries. In any case, until the possible influence of SES on the variables studied is investigated, this factor can be assumed to have contaminated many of the findings reported in Study 5.

A second methodological annotation concerns two measures employed to assess students’ mental health/antisocial behavior and school performance. The problem is simply that both assessments were carried out by the children’s teachers. This procedure may introduce bias, since both measures may (to unknown de-grees) reflect the teachers’ “holistic” views of the students (i.e., the very same type of integrated view assumed in Study 5).

Study 3, “Contrastive Analysis of Bilingual Swedish–Finnish Children’s Spoken Discourse,” was authored by Riita Kataja and Olli Kuure. It investigates the use of politeness strategies and downgraders by 12 Finnish–Swedish successively bilingual teenagers (all resident in Sweden at the time of the study). The elicited dialogues, which were predesigned to simulate a potential conflict situation, were enacted both in Finnish and in Swedish. A comparison group of monolingual speakers was engaged for the Swedish dialogues. Central to the analysis was the revised model of linguistic politeness of Brown and Levinson (1987) as well as House and Kasper’s (1981) work on downgrading strategies. The analysis revealed curious findings with respect to the politeness strategies employed by the two groups. Comparisons of the bilinguals’ L1 (Finnish) strategies with the strategies of the Swedish monolinguals showed differences in the use of negative politeness (11% for the bilinguals and 24.5% for the monolinguals) and bald on-record strategies (17.5% for the bilinguals and 5.5% for the monolinguals). The most interesting findings, however, concerned the bilingual subjects’ L2 (Swedish) strategies. First, notably less positive politeness was used in their Swedish as compared to their own Finnish speech and as compared to the Swedish contributions of the monolinguals. Second, the bilingual subjects employed more negative politeness strategies in Swedish as compared to their own Finnish dialogues and slightly more as compared to the monolinguals. Third, and conversely, the bilinguals used off-record strategies more frequently than the monolinguals and slightly more as compared to their own Finnish speech. Finally, it was noted that the bilingual subjects used downgraders to mitigate their contributions more often in the Swedish dialogues than in the Finnish conversations and only slightly more than did the Swedish monolin-guals. In short, the L2 dialogues of the bilingual teenagers showed a conversa-tional style that differed both from the Swedish and the Finnish styles. Since only very small differences were found between the bilingual and the monolingual subjects with regard to language proficiency, the authors conclude that the bilinguals demonstrate “a Finnish–Swedish ethnic norm of using Swedish in a minority situation” (p. 181). However, it should be kept in mind that there were slight differences (related to the preformulated scripts) between the Finnish and
the Swedish settings. Thus, making comparisons would seem to be a question-
able procedure, since they may represent different facework concerns (Goffman, 1967) for the participants. Certainly these differences should be discussed in relation to the findings.

These remarks notwithstanding, the study certainly makes a valuable contribu-
tion to two rapidly growing fields of research – namely, interlanguage prag-
matics (cf. Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993) and intercultural communication (cf. Scollon & Scollon, 1994). Therefore, the choice of giving Study 3 the ultimate position in this review is by no means intended to imply that it is of least value to the readers of this thesis. Rather, it reflects my uncertainty as to how this paper relates to the general framework of the thesis and, in particular, to the semiotic–genetic model outlined in the initial chapters.

This leads to a more general reflection that one of the most striking features of this volume is the rather loose organization of its topics. Although the author acknowledges that “Rather than presenting a coherent story, the thesis is to be regarded as a collage . . .” (p. 27), the bits and pieces of that collage, although not seldom valuable in themselves, could certainly benefit from a tighter structure.

What is more troublesome are the problems related to the treatment of data during analyses and the presentation of findings throughout the thesis. While the variety of issues under study certainly calls for different methods, this seems a poor reason to give up the strength of each method in favor of mere plurality. Thus, this work sometimes appears to be a methodological hybrid of different traditions, benefiting neither from the detailing of (linguistic and) discourse analyses (e.g., in Study 3, where only a few isolated examples of politeness strategies are provided), nor from the statistical analysis of behavioral science (no tests of significance are reported in Studies 3, 4, or 5). Equally bothersome is the fact that when statistics are used the information offered is insufficient, leaving the reader without a real chance to evaluate the findings and their interpretations. This is particularly critical in relation to the error analyses of Study 4 and 6, where the differences between the subjects/groups seem extremely fine and yet are interpreted in terms of (different types of) bilingualism in order, as it were, to validate the theoretical framework (cf. Table 1, Study 4; Tables 2 and 3, Study 6; or Table 4, p. 42). In particular, the differences between the simultaneous and successive bilinguals in Studies 4 and 6 seem very question-
able indeed, and a revision of the theoretical model of Studies 1 and 2 may be called for.

Nonetheless, I found the theoretical foundation of the thesis most appealing, particularly the model emerging from the synthesis of earlier psycholinguistic work on bilingualism and Vygotskian perspectives on semiotic development. The model is quite elegant as such, but its application to the empirical studies deserves a few comments. In particular, it seems that the idea of a critical period for L2 learning is adopted a bit too uncritically. There are arguments to be found against such an assumption, even in the thesis itself. The strongest one is based on the insight that language performance increases with the amount of language exposure (cf. McLaughlin, 1978, for an application of this argument to SLA research). Looking at the proportions of language exposure in the present mate-
rial, it is obvious that, while the simultaneous bilingual at the age of, say, 13 will have been exposed to both languages for almost as many years, the successively
bilingual child of the same age will have experienced the L2 for only 10 years. In contrast, their subordinatively bilingual child will have been exposed to L2 for maximally 6 years (i.e., slightly more than half the time of the successive bilingual and even less when compared to the simultaneously bilingual child), according to the model advanced by Kuure. It is therefore troublesome that the semiotic–genetic perspective is confounded by the effects of the amount of language exposure. Thus, according to both accounts, the observable language proficiency will be the same, but of course its underlying causes will be quite different. However, neither the readers of this work nor its author will know the difference.

Perhaps the weakest feature of this volume, then, is its ideological theoretical perspective, which results in an inability to question or even to see beyond its own assumptions. On a more concrete level, this is manifested by a rather sparse and biased presentation of literature (there is little mention of important work arguing against a critical period; e.g., McLaughlin, 1978; Romaine, 1995), a subtle tendency to overinterpret results in line with the framework, and an inability to advance alternative explanations for the findings.

Still, many of the separate publications should be of interest to senior students and researchers in the area of SLA and bilingual development, partly because of some thought-provoking findings (e.g., Study 3) and partly because of the novelty and inspirational value of their approach to L2 learning and use and to a number of related phenomena.

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Literacy for bilinguals draws great interest from researchers and practitioners because it is central to success in school. In American schools, the ability to read in English is fundamental to mastering content area materials. Consequently, much of the literature on teaching bilinguals has concentrated on English (Carrell, Devine, & Eskey, 1988; Hudelson, 1989; Johnson & Roen, 1989; Kroll, 1990; Peregoy & Boyle, 1997; Reid, 1993).

Bilingual education promotes the introduction to literacy in the native language of students. Research on the literacy of bilinguals has shown a high correlation between native language and second language literacy ability, even with languages of dissimilar writing systems. There is a higher correlation with reading than with writing (Cummins, 1991). Research and practice in teaching reading and writing in the students’ native language is greatly needed to support the work of practitioners in bilingual programs. Carrasquillo and Segan’s book addresses this need. They focus specifically on reading, whereas other authors have taken a broader view. Tinajero and Ada’s (1993) edited volume included a great variety of articles addressing policy, theory, and practice as these relate to the literacy development of bilingual learners. Freeman and Freeman (1998) covered teaching writing Spanish as well as reading, and Pérez and Torres-Guzmán (1996) addressed teaching bilinguals literacy in both Spanish and English.

This book contains 10 chapters, of which four are written in Spanish. Abstracts in the other language are provided for each chapter. Although billed as an edited volume, more than half the chapters are authored by the editors. Chapters 1 and 2 cover the theory of teaching reading and discuss issues of particular interest to bilingual learners, such as the need to develop first native language reading ability and transferability of reading skills across languages. Chapter 3 stresses the need to teach all four language skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing). The author suggests a number of approaches to teaching these aspects of language. The remaining chapters focus on specific aspects of teaching reading: reading comprehension (Chapter 4), phonics (Chapter 5), various approaches to teach reading in Spanish (Chapter 6), reading in the content areas (Chapter 7), needs of bilingual special education students (Chapter 8), resources (Chapter 9), and assessment (Chapter 10). These chapters incorporate theory as
well as practical suggestions without endorsing a particular point of view in this very contentious field. The book includes two appendices (one on the competencies of reading teachers) and a glossary of terms in Spanish and English. Each chapter is set out in a didactic way, with objectives and questions at the beginning and follow-up activities at the end.

The authors state that the purpose of the book is “teaching reading in Spanish to bilingual students” (p. xi). Although they constantly refer to Spanish and give Spanish examples, much of the theory and practice applies to students in general. Some of the chapters, such as the one on phonics and teaching methods, are based specifically on teaching Spanish. This broader appeal makes the book a good general introduction to teaching reading. However, many of the specific needs of Spanish speakers in the United States are not addressed in depth.

There is a great need, for linguistic and contextual reasons, to analyze the research on literacy development as it applies to Spanish bilingual students. It is important to address literacy needs with respect to specific languages because the nature of the writing system adds a factor to the process and policies of reading acquisition and to the development of bilinguals. Spanish is an efficient language to teach children how to break the code. With appropriate instruction and materials, students can master reading within the first couple of grades. The writing system is similar enough to English to establish a strong foundation to the acquisition of written English. In an educational environment that pressures bilingual programs to transfer students as quickly as possible, Spanish allows programs to have students reading in Spanish before switching completely to English. Other languages present different challenges. For example, Chinese not only is a very different writing system than English, but also takes much longer to learn. In China it is not until the sixth grade that students have mastered enough written Chinese to read a newspaper (Leong, 1978). Teaching reading to Chinese bilinguals and its implications on bilingual education policies have to be seen in a different light than teaching reading to Spanish speakers.

Teaching Spanish to Spanish speakers in the United States means teaching bilinguals or potential bilinguals. About 50% of the students coming from families of a linguistic background other than English have been born in the United States (Waggoner, 1993). Therefore, issues of bilingualism need to be considered. These issues go beyond language transfer (dealt at some length in Chapter 2) to include topics such as varying degrees of language proficiency and students’ views and attitudes toward their bilingualism. Many students enter schools with a linguistic repertoire that straddles their languages. For some, it is hard to ascertain that Spanish is their first language. Only Chapter 4 acknowledges the presence of different types of students, including native English speakers who may want to learn Spanish, and only Chapter 8 discusses the needs of students with special needs. There is a need for a more comprehensive view on how teachers can address the great variation in language proficiency and educational background of Spanish-speaking students presently in schools throughout the United States.

Research has pointed out that students do better in language and literacy development when they consider their bilingual abilities as helping rather than hindering the development of their individual languages (Hakuta & D’Andrea,
1992; Jimenez, García, & Pearson, 1995). In the development of literacy, bilinguals need to be considered as bilinguals rather than as first or second language learners.

As the largest language minority, Spanish-speaking students face specific challenges. Much of the attack on bilingualism and bilingual education is specifically directed to the Spanish language and Spanish speakers (Crawford, 1992). This climate has a direct influence on teaching Spanish and on Spanish speakers. Students are affected by negative attitudes toward their language; on the other hand, the large number of Spanish speakers provides a natural support for language use and development. Teachers need guidance on how to work with the contextual factors affecting Spanish background students.

There are advantages and disadvantages to publishing a revised second edition. By adding to the research reviewed in the original edition, the volume provides a long view of the literature over time. The problem is that the editors have updated an old framework. The difficulty in updating a book on a rapidly changing field such as literacy is evident in the fact that the focus of this volume is reading, a major concern of the past and a natural central topic for a book originally written in the 1980s. In the 1990s, however, the general focus has been on literacy, defined “not just as the multifaceted act of reading, writing, and thinking, but as constructing meaning from printed text within a sociocultural context” (Pérez, 1998, p. 4). In Chapter 3 the author addresses to a degree the broader concept of literacy by showing reading as one aspect of literacy and language development. In this chapter each language skill is explained and the relationships among the skills are established. Strategies that help teach all four language skills are also detailed. The broader connection to literacy, however, does not serve as framework for the whole book.

The role of sociocultural context is mentioned in several of the chapters but never becomes a major point of discussion. Heath (1983), Pérez (1998), Saravia-Shore and Arvizu (1992), and others all addressed the crucial role of the sociocultural context in the development of the concept and uses of literacy. This research has major implications on literacy practices for students of different cultural backgrounds.

This book is a useful textbook for preservice teachers because it touches on most of the important topics on teaching reading. Having some articles in Spanish gives future teachers a chance to practice the language in an academic context. However, there is a need to supplement the book with research on teaching Spanish speakers in the United States and on developing literacy as opposed to just teaching reading.

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