Book Reviews


Uncommon understanding is a comprehensive and authoritative analysis of research and theory within the important field of children’s language comprehension and its disorders. Dr Bishop has admirably met the challenge of bringing together and critically but even-handedly evaluating what is undoubtedly a vast body of complex, and at times disparate and even conflicting, knowledge and research.

The structure and organisation of the book is exemplary. Chapter 1 provides both a framework for the following chapters, and an invaluable summary of the main tenets to which one can “double back” while reading the book and re-read on completion of the whole text. Similarly, each chapter lists at its outset a series of “bullet points” that, in essence, function as an abstract; not only do these point out the direction of the author’s arguments, but they also helpfully and simply summarise the main findings from what are often complex experimental studies. Chapter 2 addresses the problem of defining and assessing specific language impairment (SLI), bearing in mind the heterogeneity of this group in terms of clinical presentation. Chapters 3 through 7 in turn summarise the research findings and conclusions to be drawn at each successive stage of the processing of spoken language from speech perception and understanding of meaning at the single word level through to comprehension of grammar and syntax, and finally on to the child’s ability to follow discourse and to appreciate the intended meaning of utterances. In Chapter 9, Dr Bishop demonstrates that the foregoing research favours a processing approach, which accommodates interaction between levels of language together with “top-down” influences, in contrast to the less flexible “bottom-up” modular approaches that find favour in adult neuropsychology.

Uncommon understanding is elegantly written, with copious clinical and anecdotal examples that both illustrate and elucidate what is often complex and challenging material. Although not specifically intended as a guide to assessing and managing SLI, this nonetheless a book that can be appreciated and enjoyed as a theoretical framework for directing their approach to the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of children with language comprehension problems.

Valerie Muter


A new book by Janet Reibstein, PhD and Roger Bamber is filling a gap in the divorce literature. The Family through Divorce: How you can limit the damage—a guide to the new divorce laws is a comprehensive guide to divorce survival. That the book is succinct and readable without losing depth is a tribute to the authors’ knowledge and writing acumen. As the title implies, the emphasis is on the family. It assumes that divorcing adults are parents and considers the impact of different choices on the family’s functioning.

The book is organised into five sections: Pre-separation; Separation; Legal Proceedings; Children; Divorce and Post-divorce. Each section covers legal, psychological, financial, and practical issues in a well-integrated and thoughtful manner. In the section on children, the authors discuss the emotional impact of parental separation on children of different ages. Using case vignettes to enhance comprehension and readability, they make practical suggestions in subsections entitled, How Parents Can Help. Another section outlines common mistakes parents make, e.g. “using the children as chess pieces” and encourages parents to seek counselling for their children in certain situations.

This book is most pertinent to residents of England and Wales who are ruled by the legal framework, including the new divorce laws, discussed. I would recommend this book for parents and practitioners on both sides of the Atlantic, however. It is well-written, practical, and comprehensive. Unlike many books in this field, the authors successfully integrate psychological and legal issues (although the relevance of the legal sections for non-British readers is unclear). Reibstein and Bamber set about to write a book that helps the reader “to take control of your own divorce so that your family can adapt to a new life with the minimum possible pain”. And they do just that.

Gerri Fuhrmann


This text is said to assume no prior knowledge of statistics or computing, but a complete beginner may find that some of the material is too complex. It follows much the same format as his previous volume (Sadowski, 1995). The change is use of SPSS for Windows, although understanding of non-Windows SPSS language is assumed in places. Basic tests of difference (e.g. t-test, ANOVA, Mann-Whitney) and association (e.g. Pearson’s correlation, Eta) are dealt with for different kinds of scales (interval/ratio; categorical, ordinal) and for related and unrelated samples. Bivariate and multiple regression and measurement of reliability are also covered. Exercises accompany each chapter and more are available via the Internet.

Jacqueline Barnes

References