

Future Research Directions for Applied Linguistics (Eds. Simone E. Pfenninger and Judit Navracsics)

(Multilingual Matters, Bristol, 2017, 295 pages)

Does it point us in the right direction?

Future Research Directions for Applied is an opportune collection of 14 advanced studies in the field of Applied Linguistics (AL). It offers a clear insight into the direction that recent research is taking the discipline and demonstrates how this area has developed over recent years. In addition to the perspectives on research agendas, the future research designs and the implementation of methodological approaches, the discussions include such current hot debates as the 'Bilingual Advantage' the 'Age factor' and other psychological and social approaches to AL.

This volume is one in a series published by Multilingual Matters (UK) and brings together a 'variety of aspects of language acquisition, processing and use. The multidisciplinary construct presents the works of an eclectic collection of authors, renowned in their particular fields, which provides a professional, well founded, multinational perspective on the broad range of studies, with a strong, underlying focus on bi and multilingualism, including studies on less-commonly researched languages.

The book is easy to navigate via the well organised contents page and opens with a concise introduction to the contributors, comprising a brief academic and professional bio of all. The introductory focusses on the new theoretical perspectives on research conundrums in AL and new methodological approaches to the complexity of real-world issues as well as future implications for language policy and education.

Following the introductory chapter the further 14 chapters are collated into 3 sections: *Future Implications for Bilingualism*, *Future Implications for Second Language Acquisition and Language Policy: Theoretical Considerations and Future Implications for Instructed Second Language Acquisition: Empirical Evidence*. The main intentions of the book are to 'offer 'original research agendas and innovative methodological approaches', while discussing some of the recent challenges faced by AL researchers. Additionally, the volume intends to act as 'a useful reference and stimulus for students, researchers and professionals working within the fields of AL, psycholinguistics, SLA and second language education'. A common thread throughout the volume is the referencing to and drawing on the works of other contributors, which seems to draw the entire collection together and gives the reader a real sense of professional collaboration and unity.

The first part opens with a study on the Future of the Bilingual Advantage (BA) (KEES DE BOT), which, considers how the BA is assessed, what causes it

and whether there are advantages for different populations. De Bot also discusses whether bilingualism is a process rather than a state, making reference to the chapters of PENRIS AND VERSPOOR; JESSNER AND TÖRÖK; CERGOL KOVAČEVIĆ, and BÁTYSI, all found within the volume, and examines whether there is actually any evidence to suggest the existence of a BA at all.

From there the theme develops through the neurolinguistics studies of VALÉRIA CSÉPE, who presents her work on the future implications of the multilingual brain. Within the chapter CSÉPE discusses the altered brain networks for language, stating that an increased multidisciplinary approach and greater systematic investigations could yield ‘more reliable conclusions about the brain and behaviour. Here CSÉPE introduces the first mention of age and intensity of SLA within the volume. The study then moves on to discuss the extended network of executive functions, while revisiting the BA and introducing the notion of a ‘cognitive advantage’ in switching trials. The study concludes with a discussion on the theoretical frame of the identification of domain-specific and general language related functions as well as the bilingual experience itself on the brain networks. Despite being a science heavy study this is not an overly complex read, therefore, acts as not only a valid chapter for scholars but also as a great insight into neurolinguistic investigations for students and those new to the domain.

Continuing with neuro- imaging research the theme develops with NAVRACSICS AND SÁRY’s chapter on *Phonological and Semantic Awareness of Bilinguals and Second Language Learners: Potential Implications for Second Language Instruction*. During this study, the authors comment on recent neurolinguistic findings on the processing of two languages and processing reading. Within this study, the question of age of SLA onset is brought to the fore with references to future works within the volume of VAN HEUVEN and PFENNINGER AND SINGLETON. A prime focus of the study is on the frequency of use hypothesis. Additionally, the concept of the regularity and familiarity of a word impacting on brain activation is raised. The aims of the chapter are to examine whether theoretical presumptions of visual word recognition models are valid among language users, in test situations. Again, this is a science heavy chapter but the salient use of visual images and lengthy discussions create clarification and comprehension of the data for the less experienced researcher /scholar.

This chapter leads sublimely onto the closing chapter of the first part: VAN HEUVEN’s study of the *Perception of Checked Vowels by Early and Late Dutch/English Bilinguals-Towards a New Measure of Language Dominance*. The main aims of this study are to discover whether ‘’excellent L2 speakers (as exemplified in Bongaerts *et al* (1997), have a mental representation of the English vowel system equal to that of a native speaker of British English and the extent to which late bilingual listeners differ in their mental representations

of the English and Dutch vowel systems from monolingual listeners.’’ (P:78). Finally, the author is interested in whether language dominance is reflected in the relative strengths of the vowel categories in early bilingual listeners. The results are presented through a series of graphs which offer a clear understanding of the broad range of phonological data collected within the study.

The second part of the volume focusses on *Future Implications for Second Language Acquisition and Language Policy: Theoretical Considerations*. This section opens with PFENNINGER AND SINGLETON’s study of recent advances in quantitative methods in age-related research. With growing interest in research on the age factor this paper focusses on new methodological and assessment issues and introduces the benefits of Multilevel modelling (MLM) on SLA research involving sampling of populations. The chapter proceeds with various aspects of research on the age factor, including a portrait of complex variables, quantitative research on where we are now, generalizability, randomization, the notion of context and the centrality of time. This is a very thorough study which also explores the limitations of quantitative research and concludes by suggesting more research into the understanding of multilevel models in the research area of the age factor, building on the benefits revealed within this study, including; the permission of multiple random factors, assessment of the impact of context-varying factors, management of measurements within and between samples, they are vigorous against missing data, can model time effects and can handle interval-scale measurements. This study presents a new perspective and an honest account of the benefits and limitations of the various aspects of research on the age factor and offers practical, academically founded suggestions for future paths of research within this domain.

The next chapter takes us to Ukraine with an open account of the problems facing language policy making. ISTVÁN CSERNICKÓ takes us through ‘’the burdens of the past and the possibilities for the future’’ (P:120) of language policy making, presenting data from policies aimed at creating balance, the so called balance upset of (2004-2010), the Yankovych era (2010-2014) and how language policy became one of the pretexts for conflict. The clear presentation of the Ukrainian language laws from 1989-2015 clarify the ongoing dichotomy of ‘’whether law protects the languages of national minorities or the rights of mother tongue speakers of specific languages.’’ The paper develops into suggestions for a utopian style policy with the possibilities of codifying bilingualism and offers a starkly honest interpretation of why the Ukraine is still facing an uncertain future in language policy making.

The next chapter offers academic suggestions for *The Reanalysis of- end as Marker for Gender-Sensitive Language Use and What This Implies for the Future Expression of Gender Equality*’ by BÜLOW AND HARNISCH. Drawing on the Sapir- Whorf hypothesis the authors discuss how the structure of language

shapes ones' thoughts and by creating a genus neutral language structure, all users of the language would feel included and this may also alter the way in which users conceptualise various roles and positions, in terms of gender.

Staying with language the volume then takes us into the classroom with FABIAN'S *Analytic Framework of the Critical Classroom: Language and Beyond*, which discusses the benefits of bringing critical thinking (CT) skills in to the 21st century language classroom. It approaches the study by initially defining the concept of critical thinking and discussing how it has evolved over time to become the skill it is today and how language learners could benefit from the creation of a classroom community and a more social approach to CT. The author takes the reader from the language teacher training classroom to discussing how CT could help learners who suffer from language anxiety and thus create more communicative language classrooms.

JESSNER AND TÖRÖK then present their study investigating *Strategies in Multilingual Learning: Opening New Research Avenues*, which presents a strong argument for a more multilingual approach and awareness to language learning and use and how these strategies go beyond SLA research and in order to move forward with this concept, a far greater awareness of the crosslinguistic interaction.

The above mentioned papers provide the bridge to the third and final section, which examines the *Future Implications for Instructed Second Language Acquisition: Empirical Evidence*. Here we are presented with PENRIS AND VERSPOOR'S study on *Academic Writing Development: A Complex, Dynamic Process*. Based on the perspective of complex dynamics systems theory (CDST) the authors followed the written language development of an advanced learner over a 13 year period, in order to "determine the best measures of syntactic and lexical complexity and how they interact with each other and general accuracy" PAGENTO The paper discusses the syntactic and lexical development and the interaction between the three subsystems and how the results of the study may formulate future research in developmental measures at higher levels of language.

The following chapter presents CERGOL KOVAČEVIĆ *Lessons Learned from the Integration of Findings from Identical and Semi-Cognate Visual and Auditory Processing in Bilingual Cognate Studies: Implications for Future Studies*. Continuing the theme of DST ((cf. DE BOT, PENRIS AND VERSPOOR; TÖRÖK AND JESSNER)) this paper investigates Croatian English bilinguals and their cognate (phonological and orthographic) processing in first and second language proficiency, using a word familiarity test and examining influence of form overlap. The results of the study form the basis of implications on future studies by bridging the gap between previous and contemporary research methods in psycholinguistics studies, particularly in the cases of increased and decreased L2 proficiency, especially where language attrition plays a part.

This leads us into the final study of the volume; BÁTYS *The Impact of Attitudes on Language Retention of Russian as a Foreign Language in Hungary: Some Lessons to be Learnt from Attrition Studies*. The chapter presents data from a study involving Hungarian learners of Russian during 1958 and 1988, with little contact with the language during the incubation period and perceptions of the language during that time and the stereotypical views of languages with “political connotations”. This mixed methods study investigates the extent to which attitudinal factors play a role in language attrition and offers an insight into language attrition of first, second and foreign languages and the extralinguistic factors of attitude and motivation of both language attrition and learning. BÁTYS discusses how attitudes and motivation play a far greater role in the learning and attrition of a language than many previous studies imply. She highlights many misconceptions around positive motivation and increased acquisition and learning as both learning and attrition are dynamic in nature and thus require a dynamic approach to future research within this field.

All in all, this volume offers valuable insights into many of the issues surrounding research in the many domains of applied linguistics. Each study either builds upon a previous one, acts as a platform for a future paper or explicitly refers to one or more of the other studies found within the collection. The topical scope of the book and the comprehensive organisation of, not only the volume itself, but also the individual papers, makes for a concise read, spanning a broad range of timely subjects, highlighting the main areas of development within this field. This is a perfect read for established scholars and new researchers alike, as well as for those who merely share an interest in this discipline. The written and visual presentations of data and discussions of results are inspirational and motivating for those wishing to take these projects further, with clear directions for methodologies within each domain. This is a rich valuable resource for the discipline of applied linguistics as the professional affiliations between the authors as well as their own expertise and knowledge succeed in engaging the audience at an appropriate level and is one that can be read and referred to time and time again.

Reference

Bongaerts, T. H., van Summeren, C., Planken, B. and Schils, E. (1997) Age and ultimate attainment in the pronunciation of a foreign language. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 19, 447–465.

Claudia Molnár