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BOOK REVIEWS

Maintaining a minority language: A case study of Hispanic teenagers.
John Gibbons and Elizabeth Ramirez. New York: Multilingual
Matters LTD., 2004. 240 pp.

Reviewed by Casilde A. Isabelli

Gibbons and Ramirez provide the reader with an understanding of what proficiency and biliteracy in two languages consist of and of how the reader can attempt to measure these constructs (Chapters 2 and 3). In addition, the authors present an investigation on how societal and attitudinal factors and language choice decisions made in the family affect bilingual proficiency and maintenance of the minority language (Spanish) among second generation children in Sydney, Australia (Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7). In Chapter 8, the authors bring together the previous chapters by making practical suggestions on how to achieve maintenance of a minority language.

Chapter 1 provides the reader with a brief background on the pros and cons of bilingual education and of maintaining a minority language. In addition, the term *proficiency* is presented and defined. The authors then present their empirical studies, which were carried out with 106 Hispanic high school teenagers in the Spanish-speaking community of Sydney, Australia. The data for these studies came from open-ended interviews on sociolinguistic factors, questionnaires with a fixed set of questions and free conversations, self evaluations, and languages tests to measure oral proficiency. The data were used to determine the Hispanic teenagers' level of bilingualism in Spanish and to determine "what factors in their life and environment affected it" (p. 8). The authors then describe their participant sampling procedure, basic demographics, and language of education. Finally, a description of the control group, which consisted of 96 adolescent girls from Santiago de Chile (the origin of most immigrants to Australia), is presented.

Chapter 2 addresses *language proficiency*. The authors point out that their participants are considered unique in language acquisition research in that Spanish is not their mother tongue; nor is it their second language. Therefore, two approaches are necessary when measuring their *language proficiency*: (1) command of grammatical morphology and vocabulary and (2) literacy practices. In order to measure level of biliterate proficiency, three tasks were used: (1) an investigation of the participants' academic register (discussed in the

present chapter); (2) an examination of the participants' everyday and academic registers (discussed in Chapter 3); and (3) factors that might contribute to full bilingual development (discussed in subsequent chapters). After reviewing the literature on how to measure academic register in English (mode, field, and tenor of written texts), the authors describe, present, and compare the academic registers of natural science and social science school textbooks used in years 2 and 3 of primary school (low academic register) and years 7 and 8 in secondary school (higher academic register) in Argentina and Uruguay. Using measures of complexity (lexical density, phrasal intricacy, syntactic intricacy, and grammatical metaphor), the data showed that the secondary texts proved to be more complex than the primary texts, suggesting that high school students process more complex language and that there is a higher-level demand for literacy.

In Chapter 3, the "means of assessing various elements of proficiency" (p. 33) are presented. The authors measured Spanish proficiency by using the following methods: (1) multiple choice cloze tests; (2) C-tests (to examine morphology and spot errors in spelling and accents); (3) oral assessment (eliciting more and less careful Spanish speech with a prepared picture story task and an unprepared conversation); and (4) self-assessment rating scales for language proficiency. In addition, the participants' proficiency in English was measured (cloze tests). After presenting the data, the authors conclude that the different elements of language proficiency happen independently and that "there is some degree of proficiency interdependence in bilinguals" (p. 49). When comparing the participants to the Chilean control group, only a portion of the Sydney participants performed as well as the Chilean group on lexico-grammatical competence and higher register command. Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 attempt to examine why this is the case.

In Chapter 4, Gibbons and Ramirez first present and describe the societal and ecological variables that help contribute to the maintenance or loss of Spanish in Australia. They describe the following: (1) political history of Spain, England, Chile, and Australia; (2) the geography (origin of the Spanish used in Australia, uniqueness of Spanish in Australia, the physical closeness of the Spanish speaking communities, the official or unofficial social place of Spanish in the society, and the economic value of Spanish in Australia); (3) the demography of Australia (the number of Spanish speakers in Australia, birth rate numbers, immigration numbers emigration numbers, distribution of Spanish speakers, and length of residency/exposure); (4) the language behavior in institutions (language use in government, business, religion, and leisure), and education (role and level); and (5) and the media (print, computer, audio, and

video). They conclude by stating that “Spanish is severely disadvantaged, and is alienated from many mainstream activities. The demographic minority status of Spanish leads to lack of official recognition and use in governmental agencies” (p. 87). In the second part of Chapter 4, the authors provide a socio-demographic description of their Sydney participants and Santiago control group.

Chapter 5 covers the issue of interpersonal contact (daily interactive interaction between the individual and the language), which is examined in terms of the participant’s social networks. The qualitative data gathered from the open questions suggest that strong network ties in Spanish development and maintenance are important. The quantitative data gathered from the closed questions suggested that families (contact with intimates) that speak the minority language play a significant role in the maintenance or loss of Spanish. In addition, distance network ties (use of Spanish in phone conversations, letters, and emails), weak network ties (domains of use, and ‘secret language’ use), and time spent in Spanish-speaking countries were examined. In general, the authors found that “network contact is associated with oral proficiency, grammar and vocabulary development, and confidence in using the language” (p. 142).

Chapter 6 looks at biliteracy by examining the written language. In the first part of the chapter, the authors present a detailed definition of what biliteracy is by defining and discussing: biliterate transfer (from the mother tongue to a majority language); basic literacy (being able to read and write); the importance of background knowledge (cultural and real-world) when writing and reading; resources used when writing; genres (i.e. narrative, argumentative); reading and writing skills and strategies; and literacy practices (reading and writing as joint rather than as individual activities). In addition, both the role of education and the media are discussed as having an important role in biliteracy. In the second part of the chapter, the authors present the results from their studies. They conclude that “the bilingual’s willingness to voluntarily undertake individual literacy practices in the minority languages is a crucial factor” (p. 174) to maintaining a minority language. In addition, the authors stress that the ethnic community language schools in Australia do contribute to grammar, vocabulary and basic literacy development, but that they should not replace bilingual education because the ethnic schools do not foster development in Spanish academic register. Finally, the data suggest that Spanish oral media helps develop Spanish oral proficiency, and that the private use of Spanish print media and literacy is quite weak.

The first part of Chapter 7 defines and addresses the importance of attitudes and beliefs of a minority language (towards maintenance and vitality, the language itself, bilingualism, biculturalism, identity, language proficiency) in terms

of its maintenance in a community. The data from the studies show that “much of the ideology and argument emerging from minority-language political groups is shown here to form part of the belief structure that works to support minority language maintenance in the individual and community” (p.225).

Finally, in Chapter 8 the authors make practical suggestions on how to achieve maintenance of a minority language. The authors suggest that the following measures would be a way to maintain Spanish use in Sydney among the second generation youth: (1) Spanish proficiency should be taken seriously; (2) the educational setting should be strengthened to promote language maintenance; (3) Spanish language publications within the community should be improved; (4) overseas contacts have to be encouraged; (5) bilingual teens should be encouraged to read Spanish language books, newspapers and magazines when they are at home; (6) we should raise the teenagers’ awareness of their cultural identity and encourage them to be proud of it; and (7) the importance of bilingualism should be stressed.

Gibbons and Ramirez’s publication offers an in-depth look at second generation Spanish/English bilingualism. It offers an integrated study of the factors influencing bilingual proficiency in a minority language, and it also provides a powerful tool for carrying out bilingual research properly and a way of applying these bilingual theories to language planning and maintenance.

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La cortesía verbal en inglés y en español. Actos de habla y pragmática intercultural. Francisco Javier Díaz Pérez. Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Jaén, 2003. 490 pp.

Reviewed by Victoria Guillén Nieto

La cortesía verbal en inglés y en español. Actos de habla y pragmática intercultural explores politeness phenomena in British English and Peninsular Spanish