

Reviews

Applied Linguistics and Language Teacher Education. Nat Bartels (Ed). New York: Springer Science and Business Media, Inc. 2005. xii + 430 pp.

Reviewed by

Debra L. Simms

Niagara College, Welland, Ontario, Canada

Applied Linguistics and Language Teacher Education, edited by Nat Bartels, is the fourth volume in the innovative new Educational Linguistics series from Springer Science and Business Media, Inc. Bartels presents 21 studies along with his own introductory and summarizing chapters. The studies examine language teachers' classroom use of knowledge about language, or KAL, in a variety of contexts. Applied linguists, language teacher educators, and MA TESOL program administrators will be particularly interested.

Among the issues that the book raises is the familiar question of how much technical knowledge of grammar a language teacher needs—and whether explicit grammatical explanations are more useful to second language learners than a more communicative approach. While the authors of the studies do not agree on this issue, the studies overwhelmingly show that teacher education programs must make obvious and direct connections between theoretical concepts about language and concrete lesson planning and teaching. A closer look at two of the articles will illustrate this point.

The study in chapter 9, "Relevance of knowledge of second language acquisition: An in-depth case study of a nonnative EFL teacher," is written by Yi-Hsuan Gloria Lo of the National Penghu Institute of Technology in Taiwan. Noting that approximately 40% of students enrolled in MA TESOL programs in North America, Britain, and Australia are nonnative English speakers, Lo investigates how these nonnative EFL teachers approach second language acquisition (SLA) courses. She further asks what the knowledge of SLA means to nonnative EFL teachers when they return to their home countries to teach.

Lo interviewed a Taiwanese EFL teacher enrolled in an American MA TESOL program and her SLA instructor. Briefly, Lo found that the theoretical orientations between the EFL teacher and her instructor were significantly mismatched. The nonnative EFL teacher felt alienated and resisted her teacher's way of thinking. The EFL teacher wanted to improve her ability to help her students communicate in English. Studying SLA, an expensive and time-consuming endeavor, however, helped her teaching very little when she returned to Taiwan. For the instructor, SLA courses were not about teaching. She saw her job as sharing the results of laboratory-based SLA research. The philosophical discrepancy between the EFL teacher and her instructor should be of concern to all those who take SLA courses and all those who teach them.

Another exemplary study in this collection is found in chapter 19, "Experience, knowledge about language, and classroom experience in teaching grammar," by Simon Borg of the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom. Borg looked closely at the KAL of two EFL teachers to determine its development and its impact on the teachers' grammar teaching practices. Among Borg's key findings is the crucial point that teachers do need KAL to facilitate their teaching. Even if teachers opt for a subtle, nonexplicit, "grammar-lite" communicative style in their classrooms, their teaching will still benefit from a more enriched sense of how language works. Borg underscores the point made by the EFL teacher in Lo's study—that KAL must be made more pedagogically relevant in teacher education.

The overall impression these studies make is that MA TESOL faculty and administrators must make their applied linguistics courses relevant to the daily classroom context. Some applied linguists may maintain that the "language laboratory" and the classroom are distinct arenas serving different enterprises. Yet, if applied linguistics material is to describe, explain, or predict what is happening in language classrooms, greater effort must be made to make SLA research meaningful and contextualized. Finally, it appears that this volume was rushed to press as there are a surprising number of typographical and editorial errors throughout. Despite this flaw, *Applied Linguistics and Language Teacher Education* is an interesting and important collection of studies. It deserves the attention of MA TESOL faculty and administrators.

***Controversies in Second Language Writing.* Christine Pearson Casanave. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2004. xi + 245 pp.**

Reviewed by
Christian Perry
Hokusei Gakuen University

As the title implies, this volume is not a cookbook full of classroom recipes: it covers perennial areas of contention in the field of L2 writing instruction. The book provides readers a lens through which to bring their beliefs into sharper focus so that they can better define their personal philosophy of teaching writing. The author's approach is grounded in the idea that no two teachers face identical challenges, and therefore no one prescription can be applied universally. Only teachers can determine what works best for their teaching context.

A more apt title might be "An Introduction to Controversies in Second Language Writing." Experienced researchers will probably find little new, but practitioners with some background in writing instruction will discover the work a useful starting point for developing an informed approach to writing pedagogy. Casanave's presentation of arguments and counterarguments will prompt thoughtful readers to question their own assumptions and reexamine day-to-day classroom routine. For instance, though most teachers presume error correction to be indispensable, the author points out that scant evidence exists that correction effects improvement in student writing.

Its claims to the contrary notwithstanding, the book may not be suitable for teachers about to venture into the writing classroom for the first time. The author devotes more time to raising questions than answering them and offers little guidance for handling a first writing course. While veteran writing teachers can reflect on their own practices and choices as they read *Controversies*, novices, with no context or experience, can only speculate about how the issues apply to the writing classroom.

Except for a slight departure in chapter 1, each of the six chapters follows the same format. It opens with quotations from prominent voices representative of the positions in the controversy or controversies to be discussed. A short set of "Leading Questions" tells readers what to keep in mind as they go through the chapter and to answer for themselves when they have finished. The section "Introduction to the Issues" pro-

vides just that. Next, "Discussions in the Literature" refines the debate with arguments linked to research findings. "Classroom Perspectives" considers the issues within a more practical framework. The "Ongoing Questions" section recapitulates the salient issues in the chapter and includes questions that may never have satisfactory final answers. "Beliefs and Practices" invites readers to ponder the controversies in terms of their own teaching contexts. Each chapter ends with several pages of "References and Relevant Readings" for those wishing to investigate the issue further.

Chapter 1, "Beliefs and Realities: A Framework for Decision Making," conveys the importance of developing a philosophy of writing pedagogy, the challenges of formulating an approach, and a brief history of the author's personal struggles as a writing teacher. Chapter 2, "Contrastive Rhetoric," (CR) centers on the seminal Kaplan (1966) article that proclaimed that each culture has a unique structure for its written discourse and that these disparities are a source of difficulty for L2 writers. It summarizes the arguments offered by proponents of CR, as well as the criticism that has been leveled at Kaplan's claims. Chapter 3, "Paths to Improvement," investigates the tug-of-war between fluency and accuracy, the product versus process debate, and the value (and validity) of error correction. Chapter 4, "Assessment," covers the matters of grading writing work consistently and accurately, a task fraught with the problems of rater subjectivity and the elusiveness of a precise definition of good writing. Chapter 5, "Interaction," addresses issues of audience and plagiarism, the latter a growing concern as electronic sources become more available to students. This chapter also discusses the underlying cultural biases of the concept of plagiarism. Chapter 6, "Politics and Ideology," considers the social ramifications of writing classes and teachers, the needs of students, and the role of technology in writing pedagogy.

The prose is lucid, and is obviously written by someone engaged by the subject matter and attentive to the needs of the nonacademic reader. The author provides an abundance of references, an indication that her views are thoroughly predicated on academic evidence, but eschews the dry style typical of this subject matter. She brings concepts to life by injecting anecdotes, some autobiographical, of how challenges in the writing classroom have been addressed (but not resolved).

The author labels problems that writing teachers face "dilemmas," to which there are no perfect solutions, but only "'good enough' compromises." No book is perfect for all teachers, but Casanave has made judicious choices in hers.

Reference

Kaplan, R. B. (1966). Cultural thought patterns in intercultural education. *Language Learning*, 16, 1-20.

***Task-based Instruction in Foreign Language Education: Practices and Programs.* Betty Lou Leaver & Jane R. Willis (Eds.). Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004. vi + 336 pp.**

Reviewed by,

Omar Karlin

Kansai University

Jay Veenstra

Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology

In the preface to *Task-Based Instruction in Foreign Language Education: Practices and Programs*, the editors state that it is hoped that this book will serve “as a practical resource of real-life TBI [Task-Based Instruction] experience for language teachers who want to add more task-based instruction to their own classrooms.” This book is divided into four parts: an overview of TBI, TBI in the classroom, Internet tasks, and assessing tasks and teacher development. Part 1 focuses on explaining the principles of TBI, classifying different types of tasks, and concludes with Willis’ framework for TBI. Part 2 (the largest in the book), TBI in classroom instruction, offers several glimpses of TBI implemented in a variety of classroom contexts. Each glimpse focuses on a school (ranging from government-sponsored language programs to universities to private language schools) that is trying to initiate systemic change through the adoption of a new teaching methodology (in this case, TBI). Part 3 describes web-based applications of TBI, including chatting, designing a website, and using language software. Finally, part 4 includes a detailed account on how to assess tasks, and offers an example of a teacher development program.

One encouraging element of this book is the overview given to tasks in the first chapter. Willis provides the theoretical background of TBI and

then sketches a broad outline of the many dimensions of tasks. Areas such as the roles of input and output, defining a task, classifying tasks, assessing tasks, creating a syllabus, and recommendations on best practices give the reader both a theoretical and practical footing in task discourse. Perhaps the one drawback is that Willis' own framework for TBI methodology receives little attention in the various language program case studies (in part 2).

Another useful feature of this book is the depth with which the various case studies examine language programs. The scope of detail regarding each language program's history, student needs, and theoretical orientation is extensive. For administrators and department heads (or even regular teachers hoping to initiate change), this book provides the details needed to develop an accurate course of action. Even more valuable than these blueprints for success is the inspiring tone behind these accounts. Reading account after account of successfully implemented change, will move you to consider modifying your own methodology and practices. Inspiring and catalyzing change was one of the stated goals of the editors in the preface, and in this regard, the book succeeds.

Finally, also praiseworthy is the focus in the final two parts on the Internet and teacher development. Resources that examine the Internet's effect upon TBI are limited, so this book should be commended for offering a rare and important perspective. Furthermore, too often it seems that teacher motivation is taken for granted as enduring. The book's final chapter rightly acknowledges that this is sometimes not the case. This chapter offers some good insights that all teachers (not just practitioners of TBI) can use to keep performance strong and motivation high (particularly the suggestion for classroom observations).

While the book succeeds in providing accounts of successful language programs at various universities, English schools, and government programs, its depth as a practical resource for TBI is lacking. One reason is a lack of focus. From the outset, there appears to be a lack of depth in examining both tasks and task-based methodology. While there are many interesting tasks mentioned, it is difficult to envisage exactly how they were implemented; pretasks are rarely explained, tasks are not contextualized within a lesson, and specifics about time, teacher assistance, and student problem areas are ignored. Moreover, a majority of the tasks cited have been designed for high-intermediate (or advanced) learners. Further, many of the schools examined in the case studies seem to enjoy teaching environments unavailable to most language teachers in Japan. Instances of students going to the supermarket and airport, having guest

native speakers visit class to do an extensive assessment every three weeks, and immersion in the target culture are not options available to many teachers in an EFL setting. In the preface, it is claimed that this book aims to serve as a practical real-life resource with examples of TBI in a wide range of settings, however this is a bit of a misrepresentation. The examples, while varied in some respects (like geography or age of students), are very narrow in their view of student proficiency. As a result, the book fails as a practical real-life resource for any teacher with less than high-intermediate/advanced students.

Another underexplored element to this book was its examination of task-based teaching methodologies, particularly since Willis has proposed a fairly well-known TBI framework (1996). In the opening part of the book, Willis mentions her framework (pretask; a task-cycle of task, planning, and report; and a language focus of analysis and practice) and claims that many contributors to the book follow a similar framework: "most contributors to this volume appear to use a three-phase task cycle" (p. 37). However, of the seven chronicled schools, only one uses a TBI framework that resembles Willis' (the school described in Chapter 4). Many of the others openly refer to practice activities conducted before the main task. As such, these schools seem more aligned with that often maligned rival of TBI, Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP). One teacher went so far as to claim that TBI allowed for an amalgam of methodologies that she had encountered in nearly 40 years of teaching (including audiolingualism!). Suffice it to say, there is not much adherence in this text to Willis' framework (or any other purely task-based methodology). In fairness, one aim of the book is "to illustrate a range of foreign language teaching contexts and TBI methods" (p. 40). However, to admonish methodologies that "predispose learners to a display of language" (p. 18) but then to include so many examples in which practices lead up to a task (or production) seems a bit contradictory. Anyone still not convinced that Willis' task-based methodology is superior to PPP will likely be left feeling as if Willis has sidestepped an honest evaluation of her proposed methodology and co-opted some of the principles of PPP.

This book excels in certain areas, most of which deal with general teaching principles (language program overviews, implementing change, teacher development), yet misses the mark on TBI, its intended focus. Tasks are only referred to superficially, and a detailed examination of TBI methodologies is almost entirely lacking. If you're interested in initiating change in your school's language program, this book may be worth read-

ing, but if you're looking for insights on TBI or validation of Willis' TBI framework, you'd be better served by picking up Willis' *A Framework for Task-Based learning* (1996).

Reference

Willis, J. (1996). *A framework for task-based learning*. Harlow, U.K.: Pearson Education.

***Language and Society in Japan*. Nanette Gottlieb.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. ix +169 pp.**

Reviewed by
Mark Jones

Kansai Gaidai University

To say Nanette Gottlieb's *Language and Society in Japan* fills a gap in the literature would be an understatement. The field of Japanese studies has long been waiting for a book that takes a more sociological, rather than a purely linguistic, look at the Japanese language. Gottlieb deals with the issues affecting language in Japanese society: nationalism, identity, multilingualism, technology, and globalization; and by doing so brings the reader closer to an understanding of the roles and functions of language in Japan today.

In the first of its seven chapters, Gottlieb begins by describing what the Japanese language *is*, based on who speaks it (men, women, migrants, foreign learners) and what kind of Japanese they speak (standard, dialectal, honorific, gender specific). This is distinct from the usual descriptions that begin with formalistic explanations of Japanese's grammatical structure, often suggesting that the population of Japanese language speakers is completely unified in the way they use Japanese. The book is also nontraditional in its inclusion of *nihongo* (Japanese as a foreign language, as opposed to *kokugo*, the "native" Japanese used by the Japanese) and subcultural variants of Japanese such as the speech used by high school girls as bona fide Japanese language.

In the second chapter, the theme of language diversity in Japan is addressed. Again Gottlieb opposes the oft-quoted *nihonjinron* maxim about

the homogeneity of Japanese society and language and looks at the use and influence of minority languages such as Chinese, Korean, and even Okinawan and Ainu. She also looks at the ever-increasing influence of English as a foreign language in Japan, emphasizing its hegemonic power in the sphere of foreign language learning policy.

The third and fourth chapters examine the connections between language and national and cultural identity. Gottlieb explains how Japanese people past and present have related the Japanese language to what it means to be Japanese. She then goes on to show how these notions of language and identity have contributed to the construction of the government's language policy. Gottlieb contends that Japan is in a state of transition, moving from having a strong connection between nationalism and language to having a greater recognition of foreign and minority languages that are functioning within the Japanese society. Her claims that Japan is on the cusp of a "substantial shift in mindset" towards foreign languages, and that we will very soon see a "surge of language awareness and capability unlike any ever seen before" are sure to stir debate among the foreign language teaching and policy-making fraternity in Japan.

In chapter 5, the riddle of the "inordinately complex" Japanese writing system is unraveled. Its structure is broken down and issues relating to its use are discussed: how it is learnt, what people read, what are the perceptions of language use related to reading and writing. Chapter 6 is a description of the discriminatory language that has been directed towards minority groups in Japan, while chapter 7 illustrates how the development of word-processing software has transformed the reading and writing habits of a society in which, up until about twenty years ago, "most office documents and all personal documents were still written by hand."

The book concludes with a prediction of how the Japanese language may evolve in the future, particularly in relation to its potential for becoming a "global language." Gottlieb introduces some interesting points for the reader to ponder. Considering the major changes in the language that have occurred over the last century, the one sure point the author leaves us with is that this period of linguistic evolution is far from over. Japanese will surely continue its metamorphosis as it adapts to the changes in global language use over the ensuing decades.

In *Language and Society in Japan* Gottlieb drags Japanese sociolinguistics out of the seventies and into the new millennium, at last bringing ideas

that have already gained credence in the society at large into this most conservative of research fields. What Gottlieb has put to page is both eloquently reasoned and well written. However, the relative weight she gives to some themes discussed in the book is sometimes confounding. The chapter on discriminatory language mostly examines the social discrimination against various minority groups in Japan. In a book dealing with language, this focusing on a social issue seemed out of place. A summary of the information from this chapter may have best been included in chapters 3 and 4, relating to language and identity. On the other hand, while acknowledging the importance of the influence of English on language use in Japan, she denies the topic its own chapter. In other chapters, Gottlieb discusses English-language learning policy but does not go into much detail as to how the English language is affecting Japanese society. In a globalizing era marked by English pervading every facet of all major language groups, this seemed amiss.

While academic in its writing style, *Language and Society in Japan* is, at the same time, very readable and easy to understand for the layperson, making it accessible to anyone who has an interest in the book's topic material. The thorough referencing, as well as the inclusion of a list of useful websites and journals, also makes this a great book for anyone embarking on further research into the study of language use in Japan.