

◆ REVIEWS ◆

1. Jean Stilwell PECCEI, *Child Language- A Resource Book for Students*, 2006, London and New York, Routledge, xiii + 192p.

by Alexandra PESCARU

This book is part of the *Routledge English Language Introductions* series published by Routledge imprint. It is the sixth in a series whose aim is to provide an accessible overview of language study for readers who are assumed to possess no prior knowledge. The book is made up of four sections, which in their turn are divided in eight units each, the references and the glossarial index.

In Section A, “Introduction: Key Concepts in Language Acquisition” (pp. 1-40), we are firstly presented with the existing approaches to language acquisition, namely the nativist and empiricist ones, the latter having gained greater popularity with the emergence of Chomsky’s *Principles and Parameters Theory*, as well as the importance of the input (pp. 1-6). Further on, the section covers the core areas of language acquisition, drawing on a range of examples corresponding to different ages. These include the phonological development (pg. 9-12) along with children’s tendencies to employ substitution, assimilatory and syllable structure processes; the lexical development (pp. 13-17), including their ability to segment the speech stream into separate words and to associate concepts with words, phenomena such as over-extension or under-extension being explicitly illustrated.

When discussing the morphological development (pp. 18-20), the author points to the late assimilation of inflectional forms by English learning speakers as compared to the Turkish ones, which have a different inflectional system, as well as children’s growing awareness of the Productivity Principle when constructing new words. The chapter dedicated to syntactic development (pp. 20-26) revolves around the gradual building up of language from individual words to larger and more complex units.

In as much as the discourse development (pp. 26-32) is concerned, the author centers his presentation on the difficulty which children encounter at first when having to establish, keep, develop or change a topic in a dialogue and what learning the communicative competence, named the recipient design, involves. The following chapter reviews literacy development (pp. 32-35) in terms of the steps which are to be taken in order to acquire the orthography of a language, the stages in learning to read and in learning to spell, the effects that explicit knowledge about language itself triggers (also called metalinguistic awareness).

The last aspect addressed in this section refers to infant and child bilingual acquisition, the author relying on various views with regard to the linguistic strategies used by children: Genesee (1993) who supports that both monolingual

and bilingual children apply the same strategies, as opposed to Fillmore (1976) that sustains the use of unanalyzed expressions and formulas in the case of children who learn a second language, as well as Ann Peters' classification (1977) of monolingual children into analytic learners and gestalt learners (pp. 36-37). How easily bilingual children forget a language if they are no longer exposed to it, the interference of certain structures from one language to another in the early stages of acquisition, the factors which cause code-switching and code-mixing, and the advantages of bilingualism, such as cognitive versatility and flexibility (pp.37-39), are also presented and exemplified in this last chapter.

Section B, "Development: Analyzing Children's Language" (pp. 42-70) comprises a set of guided practices which involve comparisons, analyses and commentaries on the aspects already introduced in Section A.

The first chapter (pp. 42-50) provides a closer look at child directed speech and how this influences children's linguistic acquisition. To exemplify how it works, the author presents Cazden's study (1970) that compares three different ways of approaching communication with children: paying no special treatment, giving deliberate expansions of children's utterances into complete and correct ones or continuing the child's utterance with a related and well-formed sentence that brings in new information.

Next chapter (pp. 50-52) looks into the process of producing the sounds of words, establishing patterns based on examples taken from Lucy Barker' and Neil Smith' studies. Chapter three deals with types of over-extension: categorical and analogical, which are established in terms of perceptual and functional features. There is also presented Bowerman's opposing belief (1978) that supports the analysis of processes of learning the meaning of words and processes of over-extension as based on association with prototypes which already are in the child's lexicon.

In the fourth chapter (pp. 53-55), the emphasis is turned on children's awareness of internal word structures which is testified by generalizing the most productive affixes to all items of vocabulary or by subtracting them from a word. The way in which a child forms words with the prefix "un-" exemplifies the discovery of cryptotypes, which take a longer time to be assimilated. The author's own research proves that children are also sensitive to phonological cryptotypes.

Chapter five summarizes Brown's (1973) finding that age is not a good point of reference when analyzing linguistic development, proposing, therefore, a child's mean length of utterance (MLU) as a more precise tool to be used, also providing us with the necessary rules for calculating it. Further examples present children's tendencies for a telegraphic speech. The author looks then into two different approaches to learning negation, Bellugi's view of negation as outside the

sentence in the first stage of acquisition and Bloom's negation inside the sentence which he views as the outcome of deletion of pre-elements for ease of processing. The chapter ends with a classification of types of negative meanings, acquired in the following order: nonexistence, rejection and denial, this way suggesting some differences in cognition.

In chapter six (pp. 62-64), the author provides data with regard to children's ability to acquire appropriate communicative competence in different social situations, while the seventh chapter (pp. 64-66) provides a closer look at the common errors made in spelling. The final chapter (pp. 66-70) of this section treats the subject of vernacular and standard dialects, drawing a comparison between AAVE (African-American Vernacular English) and SE (Standard English).

Section C, titled "Exploration: Data for Investigation" (pp. 71-110), looks in more detail at child language acquisition, provides the reader with data for his own analysis and suggests more advanced literature in each area.

We are introduced to research methods in child language acquisition, namely naturalistic and experimental paradigms, with both their advantages and disadvantages, following a guideline for projects involving children and a set of activities that refer to *The CHILDES database*, a website that includes major research projects. The section continues with a number of activities and suggestions for investigating children's pronunciation patterns (pp. 76-80), lexicons (pp. 80-84), their understanding of word formation via compounding, conversion and affixation (pp. 85-89), how they build a grammar in terms of lexical and functional categories, negation and wh- questions (pp. 90-97), their perception of politeness and use of directives as well as the types of directives that adults address to young children (pp. 97-99). In chapter seven, the author presents Kroll's (1981) identification of four stages in the development of writing: preparation, consolidation, differentiation and integration, and goes on to show children's reliance on oral structure in written language and their use of punctuation (pp. 100-105). Chapter eight focuses on the role of conversational interaction in second language learning (pp. 105-110).

In section D, "Extension: Readings in Language Acquisition" (pp. 111-176), the author included eight research studies meant to accommodate us with a variety of theoretical perspectives.

Chapter one (pp. 111-120) advances David Messer's overview of the debate and points to various research directions concerning children's language development: whether the environment and the Child Directed Speech assists language acquisition, or whether social interaction helps children correct their own grammatical mistakes given the fact that adults very rarely express an overt correction, but rather produce an expansion, and whether linking of speech with relevant nonlinguistic information helps children learn new words. Another debate

opposes those who see language acquisition as a process of acquiring formal rules and those who support the so called “verb islands”. The chapter ends with a brief description of the three approaches to language acquisition: input factors, innate linguistic capacities (Chomsky) and connectionism.

The second chapter (pp. 120-127) deals with Neil Smith’s model of how the words in a child’s vocabulary are mentally represented and how he accounts for his son’s mispronunciation.

In the next chapter (pp. 127-134), Roger Brown explains children’s acquisition of words as depending on the naming practices of adults (the utility principle) and also presents the contrary beliefs on the cognitive development, one taking the direction of increasing differentiation and the other of increasing concreteness. Chapter four (pp. 135-148) approaches Judith Becker’s case study on child’s invention of new words, types and frequencies of innovation, at the same time drawing a comparison with Clark’s research studies.

The section continues with Richard Cromer’s experimental paradigm (pp. 148-155) which tries to account for the growth and change in children’s grammar. In this case, Cromer exposed a number of children to a certain syntactic structure without giving any feedback, hypothesizing that the extra experience of these structures accelerated their acquisition. Another experiment, Jean Gleason’s (pp. 155-162), aimed at showing how the acquisition of the social functions of speech differs from that of referential speech or syntax, since adults take a more active part in it, explicitly teaching children politeness routines. The observations center on the kind of cognition that is required to the child (the ability to recognize a particular social situation and apply the appropriate formula).

The seventh chapter (pp. 162-169) deals with a cross-linguistic approach to dyslexia developed by Usha Goswami. The review discusses English children’s low score at accuracy in reading compared with their European peers in early childhood, as an effect of spelling-sound inconsistency in English, then assigns dyslexia to a lack of phonological awareness and explains the different manifestations of dyslexia in different languages. The final study discussed (pp. 169-176) refers to J. Normann Jørgenson’s analysis of the factors which cause code-switching in bilingual children: global power factors and local factors, and how children learn to manipulate them according to their own desires.

This book is a valuable addition to the field of child language acquisition, as it offers a unitary and accessible overview of the subject and serves as a very helpful introduction to readers that possess no prior knowledge of it, as the author clearly states in the preface that “technical notation has been kept to minimum”.

Child Language is divided into four sections which are structured both vertically and horizontally to facilitate, as the preface states, both a general

overview of the subject and the study of one area in depth. The eight chapters of each section abound in quantitative and qualitative analyses, so that they can stand as starting point for further research. Additionally, there is a theoretical uniformity which ensures that the four sections make sense in the reader's mind.

While the book does not bring very many new insights into the features of child language but rather summarizes earlier research from an objective point of view, this contribution manages to gather successfully various types of analyses, comparisons, references, activities and examples from important figures such as Messer, Smith, Brown, Cromer, Becker, Gleason, Jørgenson and Goswami. Moreover, at the end of each chapter from section A, the book provides further introductory reading and even a website with current research (pp. 72). Another strong point consists in the use of tables that summarize previously specified data, helping this way the reader have a clearer overview of the subject.

The volume is structured in a clear-cut and organized manner, making use of the same written conventions all throughout the book, and it is logical in the thread of arguments. Although overall the book is beautifully edited, it displays some minor editorial flaws: in one case an example is one time italicized and another time appears in regular font: "a simple word like *cot*, there is [...] for the initial or final consonant of *cot*" (pp.163-164); misspellings: "trabscriber" (pp. 56) instead of transcriber, "For example, of you counted" (pp. 56) instead of "For example, if you counted", "Initiation" (pp. 64) instead of initiation, "once they start added the *-ing* ending" (pp. 56) instead of "once they start adding [...]", "Whey find it difficult" (pp.116) instead of "They find it difficult", "mothers ant fathers" (pp. 159) instead of "mothers and fathers". Another problem consists of the omission of words: "you will not be able look at" (pp. 42) instead of "you will not be able to look at", "an example [...] would a child" (p. 50) instead of "an example [...] would be a child", "in control the discourse" (pp. 63) instead of "in control of the discourse", "exact echoes the adult's English utterances" (pp. 106) instead of "exact echoes of the [...]", "the tendency to produce that response and related ones s strengthened" (pp. 117) instead of "[...] is strengthened", lack of final full stop in "[...] and contrastive compounds Contrastive compounds were [...]" (pp. 83); a word written with a hyphen inside a line: "direc-tion" (pp. 173).

To sum up, in spite of its editorial shortcomings, Jean Stilwell Peccei's book innovates at the level of its flexible two-dimensional structure and contains valuable information on the most important aspects of language acquisition in children, abounding in empirical data which are judiciously analyzed and explained to the uninitiated reader.

2. Jillian CAVANAUGH, *Living Memory – The Social Aesthetics of Language in a Northern Italian Town*, 2009, Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, 272 pp.

by Roxana UNGUREANU

The book at issue is a sociolinguistical study of a Northern Italian dialect, the *Bergamasco*, spoken in Bergamo, a city from Northern Italy. The study is realised at the ground, during many visits of the author to Bergamo. It is made up of seven chapters, among which an Introduction, a Conclusion, five main chapters and a distinct final section of Notes, References and Index.

In the first chapter, "Introduction" (pp. 20-45), Cavanaugh presents the purpose of her going to Bergamo. She went there to make a study on language ideology about the Bergamo dialect, or as she herself puts it, to study *la questione della lingua* (the language question). A comparison between the standard language and the vernacular is drawn. Each one has its own status within the local culture. The main distinction between them is that while Italian is the mark of cultivated and refined people, the Bergamasco is regarded as a crude and ugly dialect (p. 23), a sign of *confidenza* (intimacy), used either by the peasants or by those with lower education (p. 28).

In the second chapter, "Bergamasco in use: the feel of everyday speaking" (pp. 46-82), Cavanaugh makes a classification of the types of Bergamasco spoken in that territory, and tries to delineate each one's speakers. According to her, people who had a higher position were not likely to speak this dialect. She demonstrates that Italian and Bergamasco, although so different, were interrelated. It was not a fair interrelation, though, as Italian tended to be prevalent. People used Bergamasco accent when speaking Italian, or Italian words in Bergamasco structures or Italian with Bergamasco syntax. Each one of them had its own criteria for evaluating the correctness of the speaker. While Italians were classified in good and bad speakers, Bergamaschi were identified as real or inauthentic. As a landmark, a good Italian was considered the one that did not contain Bergamasco elements in it (p. 51). The vernacular was seen as something bad even by some of those who spoke it. The Bergamasco dialect was considered by women as a sign of social stigma. Italian began to be learnt and spoken as standard language only in the post World War II period. Until then, each province had its own dialect. For Bergamaschi, speaking without their accent meant arrogance, because it did not sound sincere.

What made Bergamasco sound unique was its phonology and lexicon. As regards the phonology, there are certain vowels who drop withing the word, such as 'v' from the imperfect forms (diceva – standard versus dicea – Bergamasco); regarding the lexicon, Bergamaschi use calques after Italian. At the end of this chapter, she concludes that while Bergamasco is a manner of intimacy, allowing the speaker to get more familiar with his interlocutors (provided that they knew too this dialect), speaking it too much was a sign of roughness.

In the third chapter, "Gendering language" (83-101) a clear division of the speakers of the two languages is made. The standar language is spoken in a bigger

percentage by women, especially the younger ones, who also wanted to raise their children using it, while the vernacular, being rougher and 'harder in terms of pronunciation' was spoken by men or boys, who were entering factories as soon as they were graduating their middle school, being thus surrounded by older men, who spoke Bergamasco. Even so, the purest Bergamasco was spoken in small numbers at that time, only by persons who had no relation with the modern society, such as shepherds, who lived in the top of the mountains. This division between the gender of the speakers, was also related to a type of social censure. Women speaking Bergamasco were 'socially forced' to give up upon it, because they were considered less attractive than the ones who spoke Italian. At the same time, men who spoke Bergamasco too much, were regarded as undesirable partners. A father within his own family tended to speak a combination of the two languages, while mothers, even they were in an intimate sphere, tried to be consecutive with Italian, because what they were pursuing was to give their sons and daughters a 'gift, something they could treasure' (p. 92).

In the fourth chapter, "Bergamasco on stage: poetry and theater" (pp. 93-138), there are presented the means whereby the Bergamo vernacular was preserved at that time. These were poetry and theater, both high genres but at the same time containing humour and nostalgia. The poetic activity from the town was concentrated around the *Ducato di Piazza Pontida*, a group created in the 1920s. The Bergamasco poetry was centered around the past, the Bergamasco values, characters or situations. As for the theatrical representations, the most important company was *Tradizione e Novità* (Tradition and Innovation), made up of approximately 20 members. As far as regards the age of the audience, there was a clear preponderance of the older people belonging to the working class over the youth but as far as genders were concerned, there was an even percentage.

In the fifth chapter, "Modern *campanilismo*: the value of place" (pp. 139-174), Cavanaugh makes a topographical description of the *Città Alta* (Upper City), the borough of Bergamo where she lived and tries to establish which area was more dominant for each language. She also describes the transition that the *Città Alta* underwent throughout the last decades.

With the sixth chapter, "Bergamo, Italy, Europe: speaking contextualized" (pp. 175-207), the discussion is drawn towards the political sphere. The vernacular is contextualized from this point of view. During the fascist period, there was a unanimous recognition of the Italian over the numerous dialects, which were considered remnants of less modern times and had to be eliminated in order for people to speak the same language. Not only the dialects had to be eliminated but also all the foreign words. After the fascist period, the Bergamasco began to be popularized again. The main actants in this scene were the *Northern League*, a political party, along with the *Ducato di Piazza Pontida* and *Giopi* (a Bergamasco newspaper). The Ducato tried to popularize not only the Bergamo dialect but rather all the Italian dialects. It organized contests of poetry where people were encouraged to write in dialects. She then presents the situation of the immigrants, talking about their integration in Bergamo's circles.

In the last chapter, "Conclusion" (208-225), the author sticks to the status that the vernacular has within the community, presenting once again, in a few words,

the circles in which it was spoken and the factors that contributed to its preservation; in other words she draws the attention, again, towards the social aesthetics of the dialect.

The book is a study which presents some aspects of the Bergamasco dialect. The concept of social aesthetics of language is introduced and is very insisted upon.

However, although the study approaches from a detached and objective point of view the question of the language spoken in that particular territory, sometimes the tone used by Cavanaugh is very subjective. In fact, what she does is to transcribe sentences or fragments recorded during her interaction with the locals, helped by persons who understand both Italian and Bergamasco. There are descriptions of the places that she went, the people she met or the social context. She interacted with many locals, who had their share in the study. She met Bergamasco families, attended cultural meetings such as theater performances, poetry readings. Her purpose was to be in contact as much as possible with the language, so that she could do transcriptions that she could further use in her study.

As regards the information and the way in which information was provided, one can hardly find any fault except for maybe a minor issue. It was related to the erroneous translation given in English of an Italian word. The word was *sposata* and the translation given is related to the English verb 'to move'. The correct translation of the lexem would be *married*, while the translation that she identifies should have been assigned to another (very similar indeed) word: *spostata*. At this level, given the discreet notability of the mistake, I may assume it was just an error of printing.

All in all, the book which is a sociolinguistical study of the Bergamasco dialect from Northern Italy, presents this dialect in a descriptive manner, introducing the notion of social aesthetics of language. Apart from the linguistic description, it also gives the reader a complex perspective over the society, customs and institutions from Bergamo.