

Review of a Textbook on Bilingual Phenomena in the Spanish-speaking World

Revisión de un libro de texto sobre el fenómeno del bilingüismo en el mundo de habla española

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One of the most common phenomena across different settings is that of bilingual and multilingual societies. The Spanish-speaking world is no exception to the cohabitation of one or many languages in contact with Spanish, and the consequences that this bears on its citizenry. The consequences of the contact between languages may range from socio-political and educational policy issues to individuals psycholinguistic representations of those languages as result of a bilingual context. Silvina Montrul's *El bilingüismo en el mundo hispanohablante* is a textbook written in Spanish that captures well the historical and contemporary factors that have and continue to mold societal and individual bilingualism in Spain, Latin American and the United States. The textbook is comprised of 13 chapters of which 12 are organized into three main sections that include the following: Bilingualism and Society; Bilingualism and the Individual; and, Politics and Education. A brief summary of the chapters is presented.

The textbook begins with a first chapter, *¿Quién es bilingüe?*, which addresses the complexities of defining a bilingual individual, and the essential variables that

characterize the myriad of bilingual experiences. The first section on Bilingualism and Society starts with Chapter 2, *Aspectos sociales del bilingüismo*, which explores sociolinguistic factors such as languages in contact, diglossia, code-switching, and varieties that shape a bilingual community at large. Montrul utilizes examples or sample data that have been reported in studies conducted in the Spanish-speaking world. Chapters 3 and 4 cover the issue of bilingualism in Spain and Latin America, respectively. Both chapters begin with historical perspectives that led to the diffusion of Spanish in contact among different languages, and the outcomes of these dynamics at a sociopolitical level. Additionally, the author provides a contemporary glimpse of each major bilingual community across Spain and countries in Latin America. Chapter 5, *El español en los Estados Unidos*, focuses on the features of the Spanish variety spoken in the United States, and how the influence of English has played a role in changing aspects of Spanish at the lexical and structural levels.

Chapter 6, the first chapter under the Bilingualism and the Individual section, covers the psycholinguistic aspects of bilingualism that include how bilinguals store their two languages, and issues pertaining to the representation, use and processing of language. Chapter 7, *La adquisición de la lengua en la infancia*, exposes the reader to first language acquisition (L1) issues in both monolingual and bilingual contexts. The chapter highlights the two hypotheses debated in early bilingual acquisition, that is, the Single Development Hypothesis and the Separate or Independent Development Hypothesis that make claims for whether bilingual children acquire their two languages separately. Chapter 8, *La adquisición de una lengua segunda (L2)*, addresses issues in second language acquisition with a specific emphasis on adults, and the general characteristics of adults' interlanguage systems and how variables like motivation and age may play a role in L2 development. Chapter 9, *Debilitamiento y adquisición incompleta de la primera lengua*, examines the grammars of bilinguals who learn their L1 in a context where the first language does not enjoy majority status or prestige while acquiring a dominant L2. The consequences of such bilingualism leads to a linguistic system that tends to be incomplete from their native speakers in Spanish-speaking countries due to potential issues like attrition and lack of access to bilingual education.

The last section of the book on Politics and Education starts with Chapter 10 on *Fundamentos de la educación bilingüe*. This chapter informs the reader on how the concept of language is oftentimes defined by political and social entities that decide on the use and expansion of the language. Furthermore, the role of educators is to primarily focus on teaching literacy skills in the standardized variety of the language. The chapter also covers different types of bilingual education programs along with key factors that determine the type of bilingual program in a given context. Chapter 11, *La educación bilingüe en España*, deals with the role that bilingual education has had in the autonomous communities of Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia with the goal of revitalizing and maintaining the other languages spoken in those regions that have been in contact with Castilian. Chapter 12, *La educación*

bilingüe en Hispanoamérica, focuses on how intercultural bilingual education, which was initiated to promote the development of both indigenous languages and Spanish, has been adopted in a number of Latin American countries with a high indigenous population. The last chapter of the book, *La educación bilingüe en los Estados Unidos*, highlights the role of different bilingual programs in the United States with particular attention on how the design of English immersion programs are implemented more often to help students learn English more quickly.

The book undoubtedly serves as an excellent resource for a course that examines bilingualism with a special concentration on the Spanish-speaking world. First, the use of language is clear, concise and quite elegant, and would be very appropriate for native speakers and second language learners of Spanish at any level – whether undergraduate or graduate who would be interested in the topic. The arguments and presentation of the themes are easy to follow. Second, each chapter ends with a summary of the chapter, key terms, comprehension questions, application and analysis exercises, research topics and a bibliography. The comprehension questions help students monitor and reflect on the most salient aspects of each chapter. One of the major strengths of the book are the application exercises that invite students to apply the information that they have read to different situations, solve problems and analyze data. These exercises provide a great opportunity for students as well as instructors to ensure that students are grasping well the concepts presented in the chapters.

However, the book is not limited exclusively for a classroom setting because it can be a tool for researchers, linguists and laypeople that are interested in the phenomena of bilingualism. The book offers a comprehensive overview of the different issues related to the field of bilingualism in its current state. The author successfully adds key studies, including classical and contemporary ones, which are essential to understanding how bilingualism shapes a society and individual. The knowledge of the studies included in the book is paramount for students and researchers alike. For example, a classical study, Ferguson (1959) was the first one to introduce the concept of diglossia to characterize the situation in which two languages are utilized in different contexts in the same society. Another strength of the book is the presentation of sample data and examples to support the findings summarized from the studies. It is noteworthy to state that the textbook also presents brief personal stories of individuals who live in bilingual societies that aggregate a personal touch. The text also exposes the reader to relevant graphs and visuals that facilitate the comprehension as well as an in-depth analysis of the issues at stake. The organization of the textbook attempts to sequence appropriately the themes in the book suggesting quite well that societal bilingualism is what affects the individual in bilingual societies across the world, and this may be the one of the main forces behind the diversity among bilingual speakers.

One of the obvious drawbacks in writing such a comprehensive book is that the writer is unable to cover or examine the issues of the different variables associated

to bilingualism in depth. Although the author provides the reader with additional references to consult, it may require the instructor utilizing this text to search for additional sources to complement many of the classroom discussions. Furthermore, the text does not address other interesting cases of bilingualism in the Spanish-speaking world. For example, the case of bilingualism in Puerto Rico is quite unique since it has been a colony of the United States for more than 100 years post-the Spanish American War of 1898. Puerto Ricans have battled against the compulsory use of English in its educational, social and political system, and yet, English has infiltrated itself into the linguistic and social fabric of everyday Puerto Rican life. This has resulted in an interesting and conflictive dynamic due to the co-existence of English and Puerto Rican Spanish.

However, it is clear that the strengths of the textbook outweigh the drawbacks mentioned in the previous paragraph. The author has documented very elegantly an overall vision of the historical and current state of affairs in the field of bilingualism and its impact in the Spanish-speaking world. Again, even though the book is ideal for a classroom setting, it should also be read by any researcher or person that is interested in the phenomena of bilingualism at the societal, educational and individual levels; as well as parties that partake in making language-related policies that affect Spain and Latin American societies.