

REVIEW

RESENSIE

R Carter and D Nunan (Eds). 2001. *The Cambridge Guide to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages*. Cambridge University Press. 294 pp.

This comprehensive volume offers 30 state of the art entries, each of which includes a carefully selected list of key readings, over and above the references in the text. All 43 contributors are widely acknowledged experts in the field of applied linguistics or language teaching.

In most cases, the 30 chapters have followed the same basic structure: *introduction, background, overview of research, consideration of the relevance to classroom practice, reflection on current and future trends and directions* and *conclusion*. The clear structure and the disciplined way in which the writing has been approached enhances the usefulness of the text as a reference work.

The first 9 chapters cover basic aspects of teaching English to speakers of other languages, under the heads: listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, discourse, pronunciation and materials development. The later chapters cover broader issues such as bilingualism, sociolinguistics and inter-cultural communication. It can be argued that the chapters on assessment and evaluation (Chapters 20 and 21) should have appeared earlier. However, since the reader is free to choose any order he or she wishes in using this reference work, the argument would not be of great consequence. In fact, acknowledging the complexity of language teaching, the authors explicitly do not wish the text to be seen as one which suggests an immutable order or logic to exploration of a very broad terrain.

The book is ambitious in setting out to offer information on a wide range of topics without oversimplifying the attendant issues or problems:

When we planned this book, we wanted to provide an introduction to the field of foreign and L2 teaching and learning written by top scholars in the field. We wanted to provide more background to key topics than is typically contained in dictionaries and encyclopaedias yet, at the same time, to keep entries shorter than the typical book chapter. Although we wanted entries to be accessible to the non-specialist, we also wanted the topics to be dealt with in some depth. At the end of each chapter, we wanted the reader to know the history and evolution of the topic discussed, be familiar with key issues and questions, be conversant with the research that has been carried out, and have some ideas of future trends and directions.

The overall result is impressive. Not least because the authors take account of the global trend towards *Englishes*, the issues of cultural politics to which English teaching and learning is inevitably bound and the problems involved in using terms such as *native speaker variety* and *non-native speaker variety*, and *first* and *second language*. They are also consistent and accurate in their use of terms. The succinct glossary of terms provided at the back of the book is a valuable tool for readers.

Considerable care has been taken to make the text accessible to its primary target group: teachers, teachers in preparation, and undergraduate and graduate students of language education and applied linguistics. However, the serious constraints of space mean that the text is dense, with the writers assuming in some cases that the readers have quite extensive background knowledge. This means that the text is more accessible to graduate students or teacher educators than other groups. I found that my third year education students needed some mediation in using the book.

Constraints of space also mean that that 'stories' have had to be compacted. So, for instance, the parallel role of Sandra Savignon in giving substance to the term 'communicative competence' is not acknowledged. When the achievement of the enterprise as a whole is considered, however, such 'omissions' must be seen as of minor consequence.

As the authors acknowledge, choices made are open to question. I feel it a pity that aspects like *language identity* have not been given more attention. This could have been of particular importance in countries where language teaching remains largely in traditional mode with only a nod in the direction of communicative language teaching (see Weidemann, this issue). The predominant commitment to learner-centredness in current educational theory makes the failure to explore the issue of identity all the more regrettable. A recognition of the complex role of language identity could usefully demonstrate the limitations of an approach to teaching of a language which it largely treats as a neutral body of facts to be acquired, with progress tied to individual motivation and the efficiency of the teacher. Sandra Silberstein has managed the task of surveying sociolinguistics in 6 pages admirably. However, the complex issues that Peirce (1993:26) raises could profitably be given greater attention. They represent a major paradigm shift. The plea that she makes is to 'help learners claim the right to speak outside the classroom.

Two omissions surprised me. The first is *Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)* Richards (this volume) affirms the orthodoxy of CLT by including it in the postscript: *The Ideology of TESOL*. CLT is rather more complex than is generally understood so it would have been of considerable value to have an overview that gave a coherent account of its many strands. There are 13 references in the volume to CLT and seven to a Communicative Approach. I do not believe that they provide satisfactory treatment. It would have particularly useful to explore the variety of ways in which focus on form within a meaningful context (as opposed to focus on forms when teaching is driven by grammatical items) has been interpreted. The failure to give focused attention to CLT means that the drawbacks of using only authentic language in the classroom have not been problematised (see Widdowson, 1998). Yet they have major implications for effecting teaching.

The other omission is *Pragmatics*. Interest in intercultural communication has tested and contested assumptions as to what constitute typical ways of making meaning in context. This together with other forms of critical pedagogy make pragmatics a very important area.

There is at times some slippage. Richards (p. 215), for example, blithely claims that a critical pedagogy informs TESOL professional practice. While it may be that there are strong arguments among some practitioners that this should be the case, it is certainly not a valid reflection of the views of most members of the profession. On the whole, however, the authors have taken considerable care to provide balanced insights.

The book makes a major contribution to describing the practice of teaching English to speakers of other languages. It offers a well-considered overview, giving due weight to a variety of positions. As such it will be invaluable core reading for teacher educators, postgraduate students and researchers in language teaching.

E Ridge
Division of English
Faculty of Education
University of Stellenbosch

REFERENCES

- PEIRCE, BN. 1993. Language learning, social identity and immigrant women. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Toronto.
- WIDDOWSON, HG. 1998. Context, community and authentic language. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32(4):705-716.