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Date: 23-Feb-2008
From: Randall Eggert <randy@linguistlist.org >
Subject: Review: Sociolinguistics: ten Thije & Zeevaert (2007)

-----Message 1 -----
Date: Sat, 23 Feb 2008 20:46:06
From: Randall Eggert [randy@linguistlist.org]
Subject: Review: Sociolinguistics: ten Thije & Zeevaert (2007)
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EDITORS: ten Thije, Jan D.; Zeevaert, Ludger

TITLE: Receptive Multilingualism

SUBTITLE: Linguistic analyses, language policies and didactic concepts

SERIES: Hamburg Studies on Multilingualism (HSM)

PUBLISHER: John Benjamins Publishing Company

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SUMMARY

This book presents a comprehensive analysis of receptive multilingualism in Europe. It not only scrutinizes a relatively neglected topic within the field of multilingualism but does so with the purpose of revealing new perspectives from different theoretical frameworks on the linguistic analyses of receptive multilingualism in Europe, it stimulates the readers, and sets the agenda for future research. Another significant contribution of the book is that, while principally focusing on receptive multilingualism, it helps the reader reconstruct the historical developments of various multilingual constellations in Europe.

The book is an edited collection of chapters consisting of four main parts: Part I: Historical development of receptive multilingualism; Part II: Receptive multilingualism in discourse; Part III: Testing mutual understanding in receptive multilingual communication; and Part IV: Determining the possibilities of reading comprehension in related languages. Each chapter of these parts is a separate paper examining receptive multilingualism in a special context and from a different perspective. Notes and the list of references cited are given after each paper as is the case in such collections, while the name and subject indices are placed at the end of the book. This review will start with a chapter-by-chapter concise description and will then offer a critical evaluation of the book as a whole.

Studies on receptive multilingualism have a long tradition going back to the early fifties. With Einar Haugen's seminal work entitled (in the revised English version) "Semi-communication: the language gap in Scandinavia" (Haugen, 1966), the phenomenon of receptive multilingualism was first introduced into the field with the term 'semi-communication'. Following that and using the term 'receptive multilingualism', multilingual communication between neighboring languages was of interest to many other researchers. To list some of them, communication among Scandinavians (Maurud, 1976; Zeevaert, 2004), Spanish and Portuguese (Jensen, 1989) and Slovakian and Czech (Budovicova, 1987) attracted attention. This book can be considered as a refreshing addition to the existing work on receptive

multilingualism.

The introductory chapter by the editors clarifies the focus of the book by defining the concept of receptive multilingualism as "the language constellation in which interlocutors use their respective mother tongues while speaking to each other" (p.1). Specifying the three tacit assumptions that the volume aims to challenge in the field of multilingual communication research, the editors present the main line of arguments pursued by each chapter (p. 2):

1. Multilingualism is a social phenomenon deeply embedded in European language history.
2. Multilingual understanding does not necessarily require near-native language competency.
3. English as lingua franca is not the one and only solution for interlingual communication in Europe.

The editors, then, referring to the contributions in this volume briefly explain their position vis-à-vis these assumptions. To start with the first assumption, the fact that linguistic and cultural diversity is profoundly settled in the history of Europe has its reflections on the present linguistic situation and the related principles of European Union, which are declared by the European motto "unity in diversity". Considering the second assumption, the editors state that near-native language competency is no longer a precondition for successful multilingual communication to occur in various settings. Instead, the editors emphasize the necessity for the description of new oral and written competencies involving notions like meta-linguistic and intercultural understanding, action and institutional knowledge. As for the third assumption, lingua franca English, the editors highlight the fact that English is an important international language which, however, should not be regarded as the one and only solution for interlingual communication in Europe. On the contrary, they propose the method of receptive multilingualism as an efficient way for mutual comprehension depending on the typological distance of the languages involved, the language competencies of the participants, and the preconditions of the communication context. The editorial introduction ends with an outline of each chapter written by researchers from a wide spread of affiliations.

Part I, entitled "Historical development of receptive multilingualism", consists of two chapters. The first chapter in this part presents a comprehensible survey of the linguistic situation in northern Europe in the late Middle Ages and early Modern Times (Chapter 1: Receptive multilingualism in Northern Europe in the Middle ages: A description of a scenario, by Kurt Braunmüller. pp. 25-47). Braunmüller starts his article with the reproach that receptive multilingualism has not received sufficient attention as opposed to the other forms of active/productive bilingualism and it has still not been considered as a manifestation of bilingualism in its own right. Referring to the early manifestations of receptive multilingualism when giving the features that

distinguish receptive multilingualism and productive bi/multilingualism, he states that especially between genetically closely related languages (e.g. the relationship between Low German and the Scandinavian languages/dialects explained in this article) receptive multilingualism was then a kind of asymmetric communication restricted to face-to-face interaction. The linguistic forms played only a marginal role. Linguistic fluency or a comprehensive understanding of the addressee's language was neither necessary nor expected. It was more purpose-oriented and context or addressee-dependent. Perhaps most important of all, Braunmüller reminds us that at that time perfect command of a language was not something expected. However, more recently, due to the rise of nationalism, language and identity have become closely intertwined and receptive multilingualism has lost its status. Based on the evidence of the morphological form of the definite articles and periphrastic genitive constructions in Low German and the Scandinavian languages, Braunmüller concludes his article with two important remarks: 1) Nationalism put an end to receptive multilingualism which was an unmediated communication between genetically closely related languages and 2) Receptive multilingualism represents a starting point for SLA, especially for adults.

The second chapter in Part I is another historical example of receptive multilingualism (Chapter 2: Linguistic diversity in Habsburg Austria as a model for modern European language policy, by Rosita Rindler-Schjerve and Eva Vetter. pp. 49-70). The main argument of this paper is that the language policy of the nineteenth-century Habsburg Empire can be considered a promising example of multilingual management and planning since it shows a potential that projects into present-day multilingual Europe. The article starts by recalling one of the main articles (Art.I-3) of the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe, that "the European Union shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced" (49) which produced the motto "unified in diversity". The writers then describe the Habsburg model of multilingualism in relation to the European Union. Unlike the developing linguistic homogenization taking place at that time, the Habsburg Empire had principles like "pluralist equality" and "democratic participation". Though there were some attempts at making German the language of the politically dominant group, it was never institutionalized over the state. The writers exemplify this fact, giving evidence from three specific domains of the empire: education, administration and the judiciary. The main contribution of the article comes with "the lessons to be learned". Regarding the success and failure of the language policy in the Habsburg Empire, the writers raise important issues which might be of use for democratic decision-making in the context of language policy and multilingualism in present day Europe. Although one should not draw an exact parallel between the Habsburg Empire and the EU, the principle of 'equality' and 'diversity' are what seem to be in common. The first lesson to be learned is that, contrary to the tendency towards "English only" within EU institutions, there is a need for a balanced linguistic policy which will encourage linguistic diversity in multilingual

communication. The Habsburg Empire model can be conceived as a good historical case study which might give inspirations for new projects in language contact environments and for new solutions for presently existing conflicting scenarios.

Part II, "Receptive multilingualism in discourse", opens with Anne Ribbert and Jan D. ten Thije's article (Chapter 3: Receptive multilingualism in Dutch-German intercultural team cooperation. pp. 73-101). The article aims to illustrate the occurrence of receptive multilingualism in Dutch-German team cooperation as a form of institutional communication. Unlike the first two articles focusing on the genetically closely related Scandinavian languages, this paper deals with Dutch-German as less close languages. The combination of the languages is not only interesting for their being genetically less close languages, but also because receptive multilingualism is rare between the Dutch and the German. In cases where they come into contact, either one of the interlocutors adapts the language of the other, or English is used as a lingua franca. The chapter first reviews the factors supporting the occurrences of receptive multilingualism in relation to House and Rehbein's (2004:3) parameters of multilingual communication, namely factors referring to social and linguistic relations between nation states, the institutional constellations within nation states and factors related to the perspectives of the individual interactants. Receptive multilingualism, following these factors is supposed to occur in situations where the two languages and their speakers have an equal socio-political status (House and Rehbein, 2004), when the speakers have enough experience with other cultures, when the speakers' perception of the actual linguistic distance is not too far - the notion 'psychotypology', and when speakers are familiar with the phenomenon of receptive multilingualism itself in order to adequately use it (Braunmüller and Zeevaert, 2001). As for the analyses, the writers provide representative extracts from discourse between a Dutch and a German teacher working at the Goethe-Institute Amsterdam. The findings reveal the importance of institutionalized key words as special means to ensure mutual understanding. This section is the most remarkable section of this chapter. The authors, referring to Koole and ten Thije's (1994) characterization of institutional key words, analyze the institutional discourse. In line with their descriptions, it becomes noticeable that keywords receive an institution-specific meaning that helps the interlocutors to activate common institutional knowledge and to establish mutual understanding. Last but not least, the authors explain how these key words contribute to the understanding of intercultural differences by introducing Rehbein's (2006) concept of cultural apparatus.

The second chapter in Part II, authored by Ludger Zeevaert, provides a theoretical subsumption of the term receptive multilingualism in connection with the terms semi-communication and intercomprehension (Chapter 4: Receptive multilingualism and inter-Scandinavian semi-communication. pp. 103-135). Defining receptive multilingualism as a form of communication where "both interlocutors speak their own language and at the same time are able to understand the language of their counterpart" (104), the author emphasizes the

active role of the hearer. That is, similar to Rehbein's view of the hearer within the theory of Functional Pragmatics (2006), and referring to Maturana (1998), the author explains how information is created with the contribution of the hearer. Utilizing examples taken from interscandinavian semi-communication, as many others in the volume, the article calls attention to the role of a common background of the interlocutors, like Ribbert and ten Thije did in the previous chapter. This study is important due to two reasons: first, because it considers the hearer as the key person in receptive multilingual communication; and second, it presents receptive multilingualism in Scandinavia as an alternative to lingua franca communication in the European Union which consists of countries sharing a common cultural background.

Chapter 5 outlines the Swiss model of multilingualism and is titled "Receptive multilingualism in Switzerland and the case of Biel/Bienne" (by Iwar Werlen. Pp. 137-157). The article recaps four models of interlingual communication in Switzerland: 1) the Swiss model in which every speaker speaks their own language and expects the others to understand them, 2) the Biel/Bienne model, the bilingual model, 3) the default model, a monolingual model in which the language of the territory is spoken by everyone, and 4) lingua franca English. Particularly, the article investigates how the choice of language in conversations varies in the officially bilingual (German-French) cities of Biel/Bienne and Fribourg/Freiburg where the default language is French. The results reveal that in Biel/Bienne the addresser's language leads to an accommodation of the addressee, while in Fribourg/Freiburg when a person is addressed in German the conversation continues in a receptive multilingual mode unless the addresser switches to French. The article is important for two reasons: 1) it presents receptive multilingualism as a democratic option for multilingual societies, and 2) it provides an excellent example for how receptive multilingualism is officially fostered.

In contradiction to the previous chapter, in chapter 6 Georges Lüdi proclaims that the Swiss model does not work as successfully as it is claimed (Chapter 6: The Swiss model of plurilingual communication. pp. 159-178). Giving examples of authentic cross-linguistic communication at work in Switzerland, the author instead proposes that in face-to-face interactions speakers profit from all the communicative resources they share. Based on the data obtained in a monolingual French-speaking and a monolingual German-speaking bank, the article shows that rather than choosing the Swiss model or the lingua franca English, many other plurilingual communication techniques are employed. In particular, the observed techniques were: accommodating to the other language when a communicative problem appears, language mixing, asking linguistically more skilled people to translate or briefly summarize, or choosing the default (L1) in emotionally important moments.

Another article that analyzes receptive multilingualism in business communication is authored by Bettina Dresemann (Chapter 7: Receptive

multilingualism in business discourses. pp. 179-193). Though Zeevaert (in this volume) along with many other studies blame linguistic deficits or different cultural backgrounds for the communicative problems that arise in intercultural communication, the author (based on Loss, 1999) in line with the argumentation of Lüdi (Chapter 6 in this volume) argues that, in spite of the fact that the participants may lack linguistic and cultural knowledge of the other party, for successful communication to occur in multilingual business discourses interlocutors create a common ground for their interactions by using cues and combine them with other forms of knowledge, such a pragmatic knowledge, general knowledge or professional knowledge to interpret the situation.

The last chapter investigating receptive multilingualism in discourse considers the phenomenon of English as a lingua franca, which is perceived as the leading option for communication in multilingual discourses (Chapter 8: Speaker stances in native and non-native English conversation: I + verb constructions, by Nicole Baumgarten and Juliane House. pp. 195-214). The article examines subjectivity in discourse of native and non-native speakers of English in L1 and English as the lingua franca (ELF) with respect to the use of how I + verb constructions such as "I think", "I don't know", "I mean". It reports discrepancies in terms of linguistic subjectivity between these three groups. This paper is thought-provoking and stimulating, since the findings related to ELF speakers provide further evidence for arguments against lingua franca communication. The second important contribution of the article comes with the 'let-it-pass' strategy that is introduced as a characteristic feature of ELF talk. The term, referring to House (1999 and 2002), is described as to the participants' tendency to ignore grammatically incorrect or incomprehensible utterances and focus more on the content of information for the sake of successful communication.

Part III, entitled "Testing mutual understanding in receptive multilingual communication", has two contributions examining the mutual intelligibility of inter-scandinavian communication. The first article (Chapter 9: Understanding differences in inter-Scandinavian language understanding, by Gerke Doetjes. pp. 217-230) is an overview of the studies conducted on inter-Scandinavian language understanding. Doetjes argues that the studies included in the overview are far behind in presenting how well Scandinavians understand each other's language, due to the fact that the results are affected by the method chosen to test mutual intelligibility. The article investigates language understanding based on six different test types: 1) open questions, 2) T/F questions, 3) multiple choice questions, 4) word translation, 5) summary, and 6) short summary. The studies cited by Doetjes show that, despite the claim that within the inter-Scandinavian context Danish, Norwegian and Swedish are mutually intelligible languages, Norwegians are the most capable of successfully mastering inter-Scandinavian communication. Danes and Swedes, on the other hand, reveal problems in understanding each other.

A second chapter testing mutual understanding among the speakers of Scandinavian

languages is authored by Lars-Olof Delsing (Chapter 10: Scandinavian intercomprehension today. pp. 231-246). In particular, the study tests the degree of intelligibility in Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and English via the methods of open questions and translations. The primary intention of the study is to compare the results with those of Maurud (1976), because there have been substantial changes concerning language choice and language policy in Scandinavian countries since the 1970s. The results obtained from 1200 pupils are quite similar to those of Doetjes (in this volume) and Maurud (1976), in that the Norwegians seem to understand the neighboring languages better than the Swedes and the Danes, and the Danes are better than the Swedes.

The last part of the book, Part IV, is devoted to "Determining the possibilities of reading comprehension in related languages". The first chapter of this part (Chapter 11: Interlingual text comprehension, by René van Bezooijen and Charlotte Gooskens. pp. 249-264) assesses the relative intelligibility of written Frisian and Afrikaans for speakers of Dutch considering two factors: attitudes towards the languages and the linguistic distance. The results obtained from 20 native Dutch language students show that written Frisian is more difficult for them than Afrikaans. Moreover, the authors report that this result has no significant correlation to the attitudes developed towards these languages on an individual level. That the article measures linguistic distance between the languages involved predominantly on account of the number of cognates and non-cognates is a very important contribution. The article's contribution becomes even more appealing with the finding that rather than the number of cognates, the number of non-cognates plays a prominent role in fostering the degree of understanding.

As do the other papers in this part, Madeline Lutjeharms discusses reading comprehension in related languages (Chapter 12: Processing levels in foreign-language reading. pp. 265-284). The author aims to present an overview of studies on reading in a foreign language, particularly when the languages are related. Considering the reading process as a form of information processing, the article provides explanations of processing levels of the reading process starting with eye movements, and moving to word recognition and sentence processing. Although the article does not examine reading comprehension in a specific receptive multilingual discourse, it is noteworthy in that it does not only highlight the importance of the linguistic distance in reading L2 texts, as in the other papers in the volume, but also the remoteness of the linguistic features of the languages involved.

The following chapter, authored by Robert Möller (Chapter 13: A computer-based exploration of the lexical possibilities of intercomprehension. pp. 285-305), is based on the assumption that cognate words provide an excellent basis to develop receptive competence between languages. Möller in this article explores the extent of the Dutch and German cognates by means of a computer program. The author presents the Levenshtein algorithm so as to provide a reliable measure of

lexical accessibility. The findings propose that of the 5000 common Dutch words 75% are accessible for German readers, which provides enough evidence to support Dutch- German receptive multilingualism (the same phenomenon is also discussed by Ribbert and ten Thije in this volume). This is an informative and inspiring chapter which might encourage further research on identification of recognizable cognates and consequently on receptive competencies between other languages.

The last chapter of the book is relatively different from the rest as it focuses on acquisition of an L3 (Chapter 14: How can DafnE and EuroComGerm contribute to the concept of receptive multilingualism, by Britta Hufeisen and Nicole Marx. pp. 307-321). This article, within the theoretical framework of two models, Meißner's Spontaneous Learner Grammar and Hufeisen's Factor model, aims to help students identify the relevant knowledge of their previously known languages to gain receptive competencies in learning a new language. The article draws a distinction between acquisition of an L2 and an L3 with the claim that in most European countries English is taught as the first foreign language and when a person decides to learn another European language like German or French, he is already equipped with some knowledge of a foreign language which eases his learning process of the new language. Providing results from two researches, DafnE and EuroComGerm, the authors suggest that in order to promote receptive multilingualism among EU citizens, learners of a new language (L3) should be trained to link and use their knowledge of a related, formerly learned language (L2).

EVALUATION

Receptive Multilingualism is a stimulating, novel and enjoyable book that brings together articles which examine multilingualism from a newer perspective. In this respect, the volume will indisputably inspire further research in this field. Despite the fact that the volume is a collection of articles from diverse theoretical frameworks, there are some issues raised in almost all articles. To start with the European motto unity in diversity is referred to by many articles. The motto is used to describe the ideal linguistic situation in Europe, emphasizing the importance of multilingual communication (with the characterization of House & Rehbein, 2004) and multilingual education. The second issue discussed in all articles is English as a lingua franca (ELF). Although House (2003) regards ELF as a language for communication, a useful communicative tool especially in international encounters rather than as a threat to national languages and multilingualism, many articles in the volume consider ELF as a serious reason for receptive multilingualism losing its status in European countries. Last but not least, the volume is thought-provoking in that it urges some political and educational decisions to be taken to support receptive multilingualism which is presented as 1) a reasonable preference of multilingual communication, and 2) an opportunity to avoid linguistic discrimination (Zeevaert, in this volume).

The line of attack in which the chapters are organized in the volume helps the

reader to pursue the topics and connect between the chapters and discussions smoothly. The standard of the chapters are noticeably high. Even though the editors limited the context of receptive multilingualism to Europe, it would be very interesting to learn about receptive multilingualism in other language contact areas such as in Africa or in Asia in another volume. All in all, I highly recommend the volume for those interested in multilingual communication.

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