Khara L. Pence & Laura M. Justice. 2008. *Language development from theory to practice*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc. xviii, 404, CD

This text, with accompanying CDROM of samples at various stages of development, offered for courses in Language Development as part of undergraduate programs in Child Development, Speech Pathology, and the like, is meant to be distinguished from its competitors by its inclusion of summaries of language development theories, while otherwise containing the kind of information typically found in a text for this use, and to that extent reflects the state of the field. With that in mind this review will focus on how language is defined, how language acquisition is discussed and prevented, and how these concepts are applied.

The promise of relating theory to practice is primarily realized in Ch 2 (40 – 71), where eleven theories, nature- and nurture-based, are briefly outlined, to which are added two theories for ESL instruction, followed up with "Theory to Practice" insets interspersed among the textual content. The authors do not overtly specify a theoretical framework for how language phenomena are interpreted in the text, although in Chapter 3 "Building Blocks of Language," connectionist theories are implicit (78 – 9), while in the "Multicultural Focus" inset on (154 - 55), Linguistic Relativity implicitly accounts for the role of language structures in influencing children cognizing spatial relationships. Strangely out of place in this chapter is the "Multicultural Focus" inset (44) which discusses results of an experiment intended to detect discriminatory responses to telephone contact during which nonstandard dialectical features were displayed; this matter seems topically related to that discussed in Ch 9, "Language Diversity."

Since, if they are to learn about language development, students need a clear conception of what, exactly, is being developed, the central question to be answered in a text about language development is the definition and description of human language. The three pages given to this definition (4 – 6) contain useful information, but absent are the notions *displacement* and

productivity (Hockett), which are essential to the question, and much more useful than the half page spent on evolutionary speculations. This want of adequate conceptual development is underscored by the need to gloss *symbolic* and *arbitrary* when they occur much later (183 – 4) and in the discussion of *decontextualized language* (221), the concept named by *displacement*.

The field Language Development intimately involves language acquisition; with that in mind several points bear comment. Comparing a college student learning *phonotactics* is not at all "similar" to a child learning new words (76). The facts involved in the college student's case, being taught the word in a school setting, of reading it in a book and consulting a dictionary or reference text with examples and etymology, differ starkly from the processes of natural vocabulary gain, accompanied by semantic generalization, excitation of semantically similar lexemes, confusion of phonetic features, and the creative trial and error process, involved with language acquisition in young children. Furthermore *learning* and *acquisition* seem to be conflated in this rendition (76 – 79; 83, where the phrase, "the course of acquisition for learning" also occurs). Absent here is the conception that the vocabulary of educated persons includes both naturally acquired and learned (via schooling and books) strata, for which the acquisition processes are quite different.

The model of *receptive language* offered on (170) is inadequate. We are told, "with language comprehension, sentences are pre-organized with lexical items, a syntactic structure, and intonation as people hear them." This representation overlooks and presupposes just how that "pre-organiz[ation]," i.e., the internal grammar employed in and essential to decoding the utterance, appears in the mind of the developing language apprehender. Likewise it needs to be pointed out that while many parents and laymen think "infants in their first year absorb the language around them like sponges" (179), as anyone who has studied syntax since 1957 knows, human language acquisition involves conceptualizing countless intricate relations and

correlations of semantic and grammatical features that result in *productivity*, the property of human language that permits creating an unlimited number of utterances with limited means. A sponge is an entirely passive recipient, its interstitial spaces collect and retain water as a result of purely mechanical reactions. Cognizing language requires a normally functioning, albeit, in a child, a developing, human nervous system and a cognizing subject; the water absorption of a sponge, however, is the result of the activity of an external agent which brings it into contact with water (and perhaps compresses it).

An application for these concepts can be found in the exercise "*Find the dax*" vs. "*Find dax*" (231), where we learn that children find "the inanimate object" when told the former, and "the animate object" for the latter. Students have an opportunity to grasp that the conceptualizations involved here include *definiteness*, and the semantico-grammatical category *determiner* and subcategory *article*, along with *transitive* in the V – O constituent that forms the *imperative* in English, correlated with the semantic features *animate* and *inanimate*.

The chart of vowels and consonants (23) that demonstrates sounds of and IPA symbols for English contains some oddities. *Blue* and *hoof* are listed with the same symbol /ʊ/; two schwa sounds are distinguished along with two rhoticized schwas, each with a distinct symbol — and this in a text intended for students with no background in language studies and phonetics; the Eastern Seaboard /ɔ/ is listed for *bought* — one finds this in general reference books, but the well-known situation in the United States is that most areas realize such words with /a/. Entering this degree of complexity of signification in a text for students at this level is asking for trouble.

But that assumes that any student is still standing after passing the IPA charts, *en toto*, for consonantal phonemes, nonpulmonic consonants, supersegmentals, vowels (all 28), diacritics (3 columns of 12 rows worth), and 'other symbols' (11). What in the world is little Heather in the corner seat going to do with this onslaught of undecipherable information, included in the section

that introduces "Speech"? Is she actually intended to learn about the human anatomy, and the articulatory and typological facts to which the items in these charts refer? Evidently the authors also lack confidence in the effectiveness of this lesson in a chapter whose ostensible goal is establishing the concept *human language*, as later *nasalized*, *stops*, *rounded vowels*, and *high front vowels* are glossed, along with *ŋ* (156), and a dozen or so basic IPA symbols for English and the sounds to which they refer are glossed and exemplified (235). Likewise glossed later is the concept *grammatical morphemes* (82 – 3) and *derivational morphemes* (235).

The oft used method of textual organization, one that makes sense in this subject, is to provide a foundation in the basic concepts before moving on to the principles and practices whose apprehension rests upon them, without exceeding what is required to establish the fundamentals. In that regard we see *joint attention* glossed (163) only after numerous uses of the term in the text.

Data reproduced in the text demonstrate that the uses of "complex syntax" in a developing child is indexed by the language of the mother or caregiver (94 – 5). The same concept is represented in the relation of SES with vocabulary size and mean length of utterance (MLU). (The authors use the terms "associated" and "effect," but what is being discussed is an *index*, i.e., a relation of spatio-temporal continuity.) Basil Bernstein (1971, *Class, Codes, and Control*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul) reported on this relation extensively and is an excellent reference for the topic. Practitioners must recognize also, in this context, that the generations since the 1980s have in the main been raised substantially by non-parent caregivers, typically working class women with high school or lesser education, as the language development characteristics indexed by their SES are found in the speech (and writing) of a great many pupils in today's schools.

Students are told that the long-observed fact that girls precede boys in language development up to a certain age is accounted for by the assertion that "girls model their language on that of their mothers, who are typically more verbal than are fathers" (243). First of all, Bernstein (*ibid.*) found that the SES indexing of language features, attributable to the education level (and therefore speech) of the mother, has cross-gender effects; after all, the same mother (or daycare worker) serves as the linguistic model for both the boys and girls under her charge. Second, numerous studies have disproved this old myth (e.g., Matthias R. Mehl, Simine Vazire, Nairán Ramírez-Esparza, Richard B. Slatcher, & James W. Pennebaker. 6 July 2007. Are Women Really More Talkative Than Men? *Science. Vol. 317*. no. 5834, p. 82.). Although it has much currency in cultural folklore and in the intuitive tradition of the 1970s, it is absolutely astonishing to encounter this old stereotype in a textbook published in 2008.

The Multicultural Focus inset which discusses language development in relation to poverty (81) focuses entirely on economic indices. The abstraction *poverty* includes, however, severally or in combination, a host of ills including alcoholism, drug use, child neglect, violence in the home and against the child, poor nutrition and sleep practices, and mental illness, which are known to directly diminish neurological functioning, cognitive activity, and along with low levels of literacy, language development. These are the specific sources of the "deleterious effects of poverty on the building blocks of language" (*ibid.*). It is a political reality that such topics are required in textbook publishing today; there is no need, though, for perfunctory treatment.

The field as a whole relies extensively on milestones based on average onset of features measured during clinical observation. This text, to its credit, offers a range of values for numerous topics, such as the acquisition of consonantal phonemes (Fig. 3.5, 100) where /p/ is shown to appear at a range from less than two years to three years and /ʒ/ at from six to more

than eight years, and a table which offers a range of values for MLU (Table 3.3, 92), and the fact of "Interindividual Differences" are discussed (170 – 172), the inclusion of which supports this understanding.

In other areas, though, the text represents milestones based on averages, as in "[o]n average, infants produce their first true word at age 12 months" (167) and the two-page graphic "Developmental Timeline" (186 – 87) appears. Using averages in assessing language development obfuscates the situation by masking the realities of speech development and falsifying individual differences. While it is pointed out that "[s]ome children develop their phonological skills much more slowly than other children" (100), in the same sentence students are told that this "may signal a phonological disorder if the delay is significant." True, it *may*, but *usually* it signals only that the child is among half of the members of any representative sample whose onset time for one or all features is greater than the median.

In this connection, Ch 10 "Language Disorders in Children" opens with the principle that *language delay* implies that the child will catch up with his peers (315), whereas *language impairment* or *language disorder* signify a child is "experiencing significant challenges in language development relative to other children" (316). Thus *language delay* is used for the insignificant observation that a child experiences the onset of this or that feature at a later point than the midpoint of values. To this extent the term names a falsehood, brought into existing by an artificiality. Of course, the recognition, "no gold standard is available by which to define the term *significant*" (320) further obfuscates the situation. In any case it must be firmly asserted that a legitimate diagnosis of a disorder results only from a comprehensive assessment of the child's health, life, and activities. It would be very instructive to see in such a text as this information expressed in number of cases per 100,000 of verified disorders of the types discussed.

It seems a contemporary cultural phenomenon, that, like the residents of Lake Woebegone in the well-known National Public Radio program *Prairie Home Companion*, we all want our children to be above average. This seems to be reflected in the anxiety expressed about "Late Talkers" vs. "Early Talkers" (172). Items such as "Child Care Selection and Toddler Language Development" (195) appear to reflect this value on seeing (causing?) a child develop in the faster half of the range. It needs to be recognized that among normally developing human beings great variation is seen in all faculties at all ages. Thus, the "age-matched, typically developing peer" (ibid.), like the person of average height and weight, is a fiction produced by statistical manipulation.

Textbook design is, of course, a byproduct of curriculum design, a realm where economic considerations sometimes prevail over standards for what a student needs to know and what prerequisites may be established. Thus, such topics as "Influence on Morphological Development" (84 – 7) and "Differentiating Language Differences from Language Disorders" (319 – 20), in which problems in assessment resulting from the influence of native language on the measurement of acquisition milestones are discussed, require on the part of practitioners very extensive knowledge about the structure of human language, language typology, and the specific features of major world language types.

This observation returns us to our primary question: where are students to get it?

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