

## BOOK REVIEWS

Annette M.B. de Groot, *Language and cognition in bilinguals and multilinguals: An introduction*. New York: Psychology Press 2010. ISBN 9781848729018.

Francois Grosjean, *Bilingual life and reality*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2010. ISBN 9780674048874.

Norman Segalowitz, *Cognitive bases of second language fluency*. New York: Routledge, 2010. ISBN 13: 9780805856620.

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It is only in the last decade or so that multilingualism has become a well-respected issue in linguistic research. Noam Chomsky has never seen reason to occupy himself with multilingualism, arguing that if you want to know more about water, it is better to start with distilled water than with water from the Charles River, the river that runs through Boston and Cambridge, where Chomsky's MIT is located. This metaphor is striking and shows exactly the dilemma: there is something like 'pure water' and there is also something like 'pure language'. The question is what it is that we want to know about water or language. Chomsky's followers were seeking for the universal grammar which every child possesses at birth and which is the hallmark by which the human species is different from the rest of the animal kingdom. For linguists who take *language use* as their starting point, the aim is to find the cognitive and social processes that can explain how children and adults acquire a complex system such as language relatively easily without having to assume some innate universal grammar. The vast majority of research into the structure and use of language has been done from a monolingual perspective. Of course, multilingualism pollutes the investigation into the true nature of language, just as the many components make the water of the Charles River impure.

In contrast to the relative lack of interest in multilingualism in linguistic circles proper, there has been ample interest in multilingualism from other branches of science, such as cognitive science, sociology and neuropsychology, and in the last decade considerable progress has been made. Three recently published books give a good view on the state of development in research on multilingualism. Two books, Annette de Groot's *Language and cognition in bilinguals and multilinguals* and Francois Grosjean's *Bilingual life and reality*, were written for the general public and require no theoretical linguistic background. This is no surprise, because both authors are rooted more in psychology than in linguistics. Annette de Groot is a general linguist by training, but from the time she finished her dissertation she

has been engaged mainly in psycholinguistic research in bilinguals. She has developed into one of the leading researchers in this field worldwide.

The third book, Norman Segalowitz's *Cognitive bases or second language fluency* was written for more advanced students and researchers. It goes deep into experimentation and theories of second language development research.

Francois Grosjean based his book on his own experiences as a multilingual. He was born in 1946 in Paris. His mother was British, and in the first seven years of his life he spoke only French with his father. When he was seven he was sent to a British boarding school where he quickly learned English. When he was 14 he went to another English boarding school. That was a different experience: "I never quite managed to become totally mono-cultural (i.e. British only) in the way others wanted me to be. But after 11 years of English schooling, I was not really French any longer" (interview on Grosjean's website). This multilingual and multicultural experience has determined his life and professional career to a great extent. Grosjean has written a number of influential books about multilingualism, and his *Life with two language* from 1982 is one of the classics in this field. With his new book, which he wrote after his retirement, he brings together the themes of his (academic) life again. He focuses on a general public that has to deal with multilingualism in everyday life: parents, teachers, speech therapists and policy makers. His aim is to present as nuanced a picture of what multilingualism is as possible, why it occurs, and what the pros and cons of multilingualism are. The main question he tries to answer is why people actually become multilingual. The answer is deceptively simple: because one single language is not enough for them. Multilingualism is not an end in itself; the different languages each have their role. This may be related to the family setting with parents speaking different native languages, but it can also involve the need to use more languages for business or other professional purposes. The need for proficiency in different languages will determine the effort that is made to learn and retain them.

How multilingualism develops is a complex process that is surrounded by myths that appear to be fairly persistent. One assumption is that multilinguals have a native command of their two or more languages. Apart from the fact that nobody masters any language perfectly (who knows all the words from the Dutch Language Dictionary?), it seems reasonable to see multilingualism as a gradual feature: Grosjean takes regular use of more than one language as a criterion. Knowledge of a language is a difficult criterion because the same amount of knowledge can lead to very different language skills and usages in different people. Some learners manage to use the language knowing only a few rules and 50 words and don't mind blundering their way through a conversation, while other learners first need to learn a large amount of grammar and many words before they even dare opening their mouth.

Another persistent myth is that multilingualism in children can lead to split personalities, which was a popular idea especially in the first half of the 20th century, and that it can be the cause of language disorders such as stuttering and dyslexia. For this myth, which continues to be popular in speech therapy circles, there is no scientific evidence whatsoever. Another common misconception is that people who grew up bilingual, i.e. who have used two languages from early childhood, make good interpreters and translators. Mastery of two languages is in itself not enough for interpreters; they actually have to be able to keep them apart in their job. So using several languages in daily life in multilingual settings in which switching and mixing are quite common, is not the ideal basis for interpreting.

Grosjean's book is very readable, even for non-experts, and it is a beautiful and carefully crafted book with a nice layout. And that is not too common for academic books. As for educational purposes, Grosjean's book is ideal for undergraduate courses in linguistics.

The status of Annette de Groot's book as a course book is less clear. It is more than 500 two-column pages, but for a very reasonable price (€ 40). De Groot has chosen to treat specific topics (such as early language processing, word recognition and neuro-linguistics) not only by including a discussion of the main theories, but to also explain the most common research methods. So the book is almost a textbook of experimental psycholinguistics with a focus on multilingualism. The question is whether this structure works in courses at the end of Bachelor's early Master's level. As a reference guide on research methods (*how does high-amplitude sucking work?*), this book is very useful. The research methods and techniques discussed are state-of-the-art.

One of the central questions in this area of research that emerges in all three books is: in what ways are bilinguals or multilinguals different from monolinguals? In the Netherlands this question is not so easy to answer and in fact it may not even be relevant. One of the problems that Dutch researchers in this field are faced with is that it is virtually impossible to find a monolingual control group in this country. Almost all Dutch people under 75 have had some form of English training and even without that they have a wide range and volume of English input in Dutch media. It is a different question, though, whether such monolinguals exist in other countries.

Being multilingual means having different linguistic codes for specific usage situations. It may involve different languages such as Swedish and Swahili, but also dialect-standard combinations. From a linguistic perspective there is no difference between speaking two languages and speaking two dialects. What about the various registers and speaking styles? The same person having a conversation with the Dutch queen will use a language register that is very different from the one used while playing cards with friends. A lawyer will employ a different style defending a

client in court than when chatting with her children at home. Languages, dialects, registers and speaking styles have in common that they are linguistic codes that fit a specific situation. No language user without a disorder has only one way of talking.

All we can investigate with respect to multilingualism can be found on a more limited scale in the study of styles and registers within languages. In terms of processing, different styles and registers of a language are not fundamentally different from different languages. In short: real monolingualism does not exist. And the question that emerges from psycholinguistics is whether different languages have a specific status in the brains compared with registers and styles. Languages are not so much autonomous systems stored in the brain, but collections of expressions in specific situations.

Such considerations can also be found in research that sees language as a complex dynamic system. The essence of dynamic systems theory is change over time. Dynamic systems are sets of variables that influence each other's development over time. Language in this sense is a good example of a dynamic system: it is constantly changing, both as a tool for communication and as part of our cognitive system. The words that we know have no fixed meaning or function but are constantly evolving through use. Segalowitz's book is one of the first books that looks at multilingualism from a dynamic perspective. Language production is not performing operations on stable linguistic representations, but the 'soft assembly' of situation-specific expressions.

Letting go of the idea that there are representations in our brains and that the use of language is the manipulation of such stable representations, is not easy. In cognition research in general and psycholinguistic research in particular, representations and operations on them are the core of current models. Replacing such essential notions is a difficult and sometimes frustrating process.

When we compare the three books discussed here, then Grosjean represents the past: his book is a retrospective. De Groot represents the now and offers a comprehensive and complete state-of-the-art, while Segalowitz moves from a more static, traditional approach to language and multilingualism to a more dynamic perspective. Without attaching a value judgment to such labels, one might say that De Groot's book represents 'Old-School Psycholinguistics', while Segalowitz' book is more 'New School Psycholinguistics'. Whether this new approach eventually will prevail, remains to be seen. Old-school psychonomics in psychology has a very strong position which the representatives will not easily give up.