The Handbook of Language Teaching

M. H. Long and C. J. Doughty (eds.)

Wiley-Blackwell 2009, 803 pp., £110

ISBN 978 1 4051 5489 5

For two reasons, this is an immense title. Firstly, for reviewing purposes its encyclopaedic appearance means it is not exactly the right size, weight, or length to stow in one's pocket for dipping into in less busy moments during the crowded teaching day. Secondly, its breadth of coverage by an international team of specialists in a wide range of fields within applied linguistics has resulted in a combination of papers covering the latest research findings on not only established core topics, but others either rapidly developing or in recent years given less regard. The latest in a series from Blackwell covering all the major sub-disciplines within linguistics, *The Handbook of Language Teaching* (*THLT*), is divided into eight main parts. The number of chapters, 39 amounting to over 800 pages all told, necessarily limits the scope of a review such as this, but as far as possible I have tried to provide a general flavour of the goods inside.

Part 1, consisting only of his overview titled 'Language teaching', is by co-author Michael Long who lists the many groups of people involved nowadays in language learning. Some learning, Long explains, is done as a necessity due to fleeing drought or famine, and he predicts climate change will impact on the language teaching fraternity in an increasingly critical manner for the foreseeable future. He adds how contributors to this title were asked to focus not so much on English but more on language in general, although given its global importance it is noticeable how in most chapters English is generally the main focus.

Part 2, on the 'Social, political and educational contexts of language teaching', consists of three chapters. The first by McKay and Rubdy deals with the social and sociolinguistic contexts of language teaching. They illustrate how by focusing on the work of Kachru (1986) and his notions of Inner, Outer, and Expanding Circles, social and sociolinguistic factors have several implications for language learning. They suggest, for example, that negative attitudes, shown by native students at university level in Australia offered academic incentives for learning languages other than English, indicate how '. . . English-speaking populations of Inner Circle countries may be the least likely to become bilingual in an increasingly multilingual and multicultural world' (p. 17). Concerning 'Outer Circle' learning contexts, where English serves as an L2 in a multilingual country such as India or Singapore, the authors refer to Kamwangamalu (2003: 68–9) who points out how the spread of English in countries such as South Africa has led activists and community leaders there to see '. . . the spread of English into the family domain as a threat to the maintenance and a prelude to the demise of the indigenous languages' (p. 20). Within the Expanding Circle, where English is widely studied as a foreign language, the authors focus on policy for English language learning in Sweden where in the latter '. . . the fear of the growing use of English is in sharp contrast to the prevalent belief that knowledge of English provides access to the global economy' (p. 23). The two other chapters in this part deal firstly with 'The Politics and policies of language and language teaching', in which Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas discuss linguistic human rights and language policy in the European region, and then 'The history of language teaching' in which Musumeci states how the historical record implies '. . . attempts to force students to use a language that is not necessary for the acquisition of subject matter knowledge in the classroom or that serves no practical purpose outside it have small hope of success' (p. 61).

Chapter 1 of Part 3, which covers the 'Psycholinguistic underpinnings of language Learning', looks at 'The language-learning brain', in which Beretta concludes '. . . neurolinguistics is at a very preliminary stage of development' (p. 76). Next, in 'Sequences and processes in language learning', Ortega lists five

generalizations about the relationship between interlanguage development and instruction, concluding that '. . . it would be unadvisable to develop instructional curricula around the known sequences of L2 development, for several reasons' (p. 100). Following this, and writing on 'The importance of cross-linguistic similarity in foreign language learning', Ringbom and Jarvis discuss the implications of this area for teaching, describing 'EuroCom', a materials writing project that takes advantage of speakers of romance languages. In spite of such projects they comment how '. . . even though they have a larger learning burden, learners of a distant language can be ultimately as successful as learners of a closely related language when learning conditions are favourable' (p. 115). The final two chapters in this part look at cognitive–psychological processes and optimizing language input.

Part 4, titled 'Program design', looks firstly at work by Cummins on 'Bilingual and immersion programs' in which he outlines the general outcomes of each, while also dealing with dissenting perspectives and pedagogical issues. Montrul, in 'Heritage language programs', concludes that due to the infancy of the field there is ample room for investigation, while following this (Ken) Hyland, on 'Specific purpose programs', concludes optimistically that due in part to its sensitivity to local contexts, this field is moving healthily forwards. In 'Study abroad research', Collentine points out how most work conducted on this topic has concentrated on the American university experience, and far too little on learners in Erasmus programmes, concluding that 'We need to learn much more about the effects of study abroad on advanced learners' (p. 230). Gor and Vatz in the next chapter explain issues involving the teaching and learning of 'Less commonly taught languages' (LCTLs), pointing out how an LCTL is '(one) considered important by the government, but unsustainable by the market' (p. 235). The authors also respond to reasons generally given for a language being less commonly taught, such as typological differences between non-cognate languages. They end by outlining the critical role a number of LCTLs currently play in the national security of the United States. Part 4 ends with Rivers and Golonka's work on another area growing in importance in recent years: 'Third language acquisition theory and practice'. Working from data concerning adult learners they explain how L3 acquisition differs substantially from that of L2 and conclude with questions on bilingualism which they believe '. . . approximates a research agenda (for L3) that would greatly enrich our understanding of the processes underlying all adult language acquisition' (p. 263).

Part 5 of *THLT* covers 'Course design and materials writing' in which the first chapter by Brown, 'Foreign and second language needs analysis', addresses in detail the three most basic questions about needs analysis (NA): what NA is, what literature is available on this topic, and what the steps involved in NA concern. In 'Syllabus design' (SD), Robinson outlines the two traditional approaches to SD: the grammatical and notional–functional syllabus and then explains contemporary rationales behind the structural and lexical syllabus, before concluding that, 'The shift from synthetic to analytic approaches to syllabus design . . . is one that can be expected to continue' (p. 306). Waters, writing on 'Advances in materials design', looks at major international course books such as the Headway series (Oxford University Press) and analyses this and others in terms of authenticity, language practice, and syllabus/unit structure. He concludes that findings indicate that '. . . in terms of the aspects analyzed, earlier tendencies have been reinforced, with something of an orthodoxy in textbook design having emerged' (p. 323). The two final chapters in this part deal with technology and materials production. Firstly, Flowerdew in 'Corpora in language teaching' outlines the principles in corpus linguistics that can be applied to language teaching, illustrating features that corpora can reveal beyond the basics of frequency and collocation, such as colligation and semantic prosody. Flowerdew explains applications of corpora in developing reference material and syllabus design, while another possibility he suggests is data-driven learning, in which learners take on the role of detectives hunting for language clues among corpora. This particular chapter I found a refreshing change from others described thus far, drawing on extracts illustrating a service encounter in a fish and chip shop and a worksheet based on a Lonely Hearts advertisement. Part 5 ends with 'Technology-enhanced materials', in which Brett and Gonzalez-Lloret illustrate a range of projects that teachers with varying budgets may develop, such as web-based prototypes with 3D characters to teach non-verbal behaviour, and on a more humble scale the use of Flash MP3 players for teaching advanced-level Spanish.

Part 6, titled 'Teaching and testing', is, running to 13 chapters, by far the longest in *THLT*. Following co-author Long's coverage of 'Methodological principles of language teaching', which he discusses in terms of a pendulum, Vandergrift and Goh's 'Teaching and testing listening comprehension' immediately shoots from the hip, stating: 'For years, the role of listening in language acquisition and communication was undervalued and neglected. Speaking and foreign language listening was often

developed incidentally . . .' (p. 359). They conclude by praising the development of pre-listening activities, but add that in spite of some recent advances, listening remains the least understood of the four language skills. Bygate's chapter on 'Teaching and testing speaking' asks two central questions concerning a speaker's proficiency, before illustrating with examples the difficulty of accurately assessing speakers' levels. In 'Teaching and testing reading', Grabe firstly points out that this area has a history of research effort that goes back for decades, before developing the concept that 'L1 and L2 reading abilities share many of the same component skills' (p. 447). Koda, on 'Learning to read in new writing systems', describes how knowledge of the writing system contributes to literacy learning, and how knowledge in one language affects learning to read in another. In 'Teaching and testing writing', Polio and Williams explore the relationship between L2 acquisition and writing, then examine the effect research has had on the writing process, plus recent developments in writing pedagogy. More specifically, the authors explain how reasons for a lack of consensus concerning the effects of grammar error correction rest in the design of the studies and that research on feedback in writing conferences (teacher–student oral exchanges) suggests a relationship between degrees of negotiation and successful revision. The authors also note how portfolio assessment may more clearly identify successful writers, how some scholars have urged that testing institutions re-examine the ways in which their instruments serve the entire international community, plus how results of research into the assessment of hand-written and computer-written essays tend to conflict. Space prohibits more details on each of them, but the remaining chapters in this Part also look at research into grammar, vocabulary, pragmatics, task-based teaching, radical language teaching, diagnostic feedback, and computer-assisted teaching and testing.

The final two parts in this title look at the training of teachers and the evaluation of their performance. Part 7, on 'Teacher education', rather surprisingly consists of only two chapters. The first, by Jourdenais on 'Language teacher education', asks whether teachers need to be formally educated to be able to teach language and whether it is enough to be a native speaker. Central to this chapter is discussion over the model of reflective practice proposed by Wallace (1991). The other chapter, by Van den Branden on 'Diffusion and implementation of innovations', outlines the importance of considering the relationship between teacher concerns and beliefs if innovation is not to cause only superficial change.

The concluding part to *THLT* is on 'Assessing and evaluating instruction'. In this, firstly Mitchell deals with 'Current trends into classroom research', including sociocultural classroom research, discussion over the multiple educational interpretations of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, and Burns's (2005) suggestion for a more flexible approach to action research. This is followed by Bailey, who writes on 'Issues in language teacher evaluation' (LTE), asking then answering questions on what the main purposes of LTE are, what we know about effective teaching, the criteria used for LTE, and who is involved in the LTE process. The penultimate chapter in *THLT* investigates the effects and effectiveness of L2 instruction, while the finale is left to a highly theoretical analysis of programme evaluation.

From all the above, it is easily noted that *THLT* covers a massive amount of ground concerning the arena of research in applied linguistics, ranging from social and political theory to psycholinguistics and from programme and course design to teaching and testing, moving on to teacher education and evaluation. It is of course unlikely that anyone would wish to read the whole of this title, but as a source of reference for master's, doctoral, and post-doctoral research, it certainly merits a place on the shelves of all libraries claiming possession of state-of-the-art literature in the area of language teaching research.

References

Burns, A. 2005. 'Action Research: an evolving paradigm?'. *Language Teaching* 38/2: 55–74.

Kachru, B. B. 1986. *The Alchemy of English*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Kamwangamalu, N. M. 2003. 'Globalization of English, and language maintenance and shift in South Africa'. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 164: 65–81.

Wallace, M. 1991. *Training Foreign Language Teachers: A Reflective Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The reviewer

Wayne Trotman has been involved in ELT since 1981. After his Master's in ELT in 1996, he began teaching and training language teachers in the higher education sector. He currently coordinates and teaches on the EAP writing program at The Institute of Technology, in Izmir, Turkey, where he is also leading a research project into providing oral feedback on student writing.

Email: waynetrotman@gmail.com

doi:10.1093/elt/ccq028