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Differentiating Development from Impairment: Using a Multidimensional Linguistic Lens

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Book Reviewed:

Paradis, J., Genesee, F., & Crago, M. (2011). *Dual Language Development & Disorders: A Handbook on Bilingualism & Second Language Learning* (2nd ed.). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes, 296 pages, paperback list price \$42.95 ISBN: 978-1-5987-058-8

From the moment the first edition came out in 2004, *Dual Language Development & Disorders* filled a void in the literature and became an essential text in many undergraduate and graduate courses across the country. For many TESOL, bilingual education, general education, and special education teacher education programs and speech-language pathology and psychology programs *Dual Language Development & Disorders: A Handbook on Bilingualism & Second Language Learning* by Johanne Paradis, Fred Genesee, and Martha Crago is required reading.

The authors are distinguished researchers in a variety of fields. Dr. Paradis, from the University of Alberta, has published extensively in scientific journals and in books on bilingual and second language acquisition focused on both typically developing children and children with language impairments. Her work to distinguish language impairment from the normal process of second language acquisition, especially with French-English bilingual children, is the most comprehensive and insightful in this area. Dr. Genesee, of McGill University, is one of the world's most respected researchers in bilingual education and second language acquisition, having published nine books and numerous articles. His research has clarified questions and confirmed hypotheses concerning second language acquisition for decades. Dr. Crago, from Dalhousie University, brings a background in anthropology and speech-language pathology to inform her research work in sociolinguistics and language acquisition, such as her impressive work in analyzing cultural influences and linguistic expectations among certain Inuit communities.

In this second edition of *Dual Language Development & Disorders* the authors answer fundamental questions raised by parents and educators, and also by those professionals—psychologists and speech-language pathologists—charged with distinguishing a disability from normal language development. They provide readers with an awareness of how the variability of linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic experiences of dual language learners may affect language and academic development. The writing style is clear, ensuring that even difficult concepts new to a reader are understood. Throughout the book the authors provide myriad examples of language from the field to develop deeper insight.

Notably, the authors use nontechnical language as they seek to reach a wide audience. However, this book is in no way a watered down version of the research that too often is found in books for educators and clinicians. For example, in discussing early language developmental milestones, the authors first offer a synthesis of the research stating, “bilingual children produce their first words at about the same age as monolingual children” (p. 44). They support this statement through a detailed review of the research and provide citations to the applicable research for those who wish to delve deeper into specific areas. For others not familiar with the meaning of *lexical categories*, the authors provide parenthetical examples. Throughout the book the authors retain the necessary nuances and complexities of the research, and at the same time ensure that the information is accessible to all.

As Paradis, Genesee, and Crago are three of our foremost researchers in second language acquisition, Chapters 4 and 6, “Language Development in Simultaneous Bilingual Children” and “Second Language Development in Children”, are especially strong. An example of this strength is evident in the discussion of *interlanguage*. After defining interlanguage, the authors illustrate how it might appear in the sentences produced by second language learners. Examples such as, “That’s why we *hadded* to move” and, “And it *gots* basement” (p. 116), show a child in the process of acquiring the rules of Standard American English for formation of regular past tense (“We had”) and third person singular (“It has got a basement”), but who has not yet mastered all the rules such as irregular forms. Through these, and many more examples of linguistic data from the field, the research and theory come to life.

For readers who may still need to argue the benefits of bilingualism in their workplace or communities, Chapters 2 and 3, “The Language-Culture Connection” and “The Language-Cognition Connection”, can be starting points for discussion. As an example, in “The Language-Culture Connection” chapter the authors describe culturally-appropriate child rearing practices for some Inuit people including that mothers typically expect their children to learn skills by watching; do not address their children directly but rather silently meet their needs; and do not expect their children to converse with them. The authors then make some comparisons to cultural expectations of middle class North American families (pp. 29-31). These descriptions of cultural differences offer opportunities for in-service discussions regarding the impact of contact between cultures, and cultural assumptions in a particular educational or clinical setting.

Perhaps less well known, even within bilingual education communities, is the emerging research on the impact of raising a child with disabilities in a bilingual environment. Chapter 9, “Language Impairment in Dual Language Children”, focuses specifically on this issue. Children with language impairments are too often denied the benefits of being raised bilingually by well-meaning, but uninformed, professionals who advise families to speak only one language to their children with disabilities (Yu, Hammer, & Wilkinson, 2013). Paradis, Genesee, and Crago set forth the basis for an alternative view, beginning with their own groundbreaking research in 2003 on bilingual children with specific language impairment (pp. 203-204). The newest research on bilingualism and autism had not been published by the time this book was released but the authors include the sociolinguistic research by Kremer-Sadlik (2005) on the benefits of maintaining both languages for children with autism (p. 212; Hambly & Fombonne, 2012;

Petersen, Marinova-Todd, & Mirenda, 2012). In Chapter 3, “The Language-Cognitive Connection”, the authors present similar findings by Kay-Raining Bird and her colleagues (2005) for bilingual children who have Down syndrome and may have moderate to severe cognitive and linguistic delays (pp. 47-48).

In this second edition, the authors have written a new chapter, Chapter 7, devoted to “Language Development in Internationally Adopted Children.” This chapter incorporates findings from the significant new research in this area. The authors begin by describing the unique language acquisitional profile of most internationally adopted children. These children usually acquire two languages successively, but the first language is generally discontinued after the adoption and the children often only hear their adoptive parents’ language after the adoption, a linguistic situation sometimes referred to as, “second first language acquisition” (De Geer, 1992; Glennen, 2002, as cited in Paradis, et al., p. 147). The authors devote the rest of the chapter to answer two crucial questions about internationally adopted children: (1) What do we know about the language development of these children in the preschool years? and (2) Do these children experience language or academic difficulties in school? (p. 148). It is a stellar chapter that gathers and organizes recent research to answer the most salient questions of parents and educators.

The new chapter on “Reading Impairment in Dual Language Children”, Chapter 10, is not as successful. The authors must define reading impairment and then try to apply that to dual language learners. This is an enormously important area, but the research is simply not nearly as robust in that area as in that of language development.

Perhaps the book’s weaknesses make a difference only if readers assume that the language, cultural, and socio-economic profiles of dual language learners in Canada are essentially the same as dual language learners in the United States. The United States and Canada have quite different immigration policies. Canada has a strategic immigration policy that gives immigration advantages to potential immigrants with work experience, higher education, and English or French language abilities. As a result, in 2010 about half of Canada’s immigrants have college degrees compared to 30 percent of immigrants in the United States; and 28 percent of U.S. immigrants lack a high school diploma (Chaillnor, 2011; Hall, Singer, De Jong, & Graefe, 2011).

These differences are likely to lead to socio-economic differences, which account for many disparities including quality of education, exposure to vocabulary, and fund of prior knowledge. An example of this may be seen in the research about differences on the length of time needed to close the gap in vocabulary development between monolingual and dual language learners. The authors cite a study in Miami, Florida (Oller & Eilers, 2002) that found it took until the fifth grade—after six years of schooling in English—for students to come close to closing the gap. But the authors also cite Goldberg and colleagues (2008) who found that dual language learning students in Edmondton, Canada nearly closed the gap after just three years of schooling in English (p. 124). While the authors definitely indicate that socioeconomic status affects development (pp. 131-133), readers must be aware that findings that may fit easily with Canadian dual language learners may need more consideration before immediately applying them to many dual language learners in the United States.

Another concern, related to differences between Canadian dual language learners and those in the US, is in the authors' discussion on how to identify language impairments. In New York City and many parts of the US, many new immigrants are exposed to varieties of English other than Standard American English (Zentella, 1997). The authors suggest that mean length of utterance (MLU), which is primarily a measure of morpheme use, can be used to identify a language impairment. An MLU approach, however, is likely to over-identify the dialect-influenced language profiles of typically developing dual language learners as having language impairments (pp. 20, 203-207). For instance, in the book's Introduction, the authors offer examples of specific language impairment in English, "He go to school every day" and "He going to school now" (p. 20). Yet, absence of third person singular present tense and absence of the auxiliary verb are consistent with the rules of many varieties of English including African American Vernacular English. In New York and other communities in the US, where dual language learners are commonly exposed to certain varieties of English other than Standard American English, this reliance on MLUs and acquisition of particular morphemes to identify specific language impairment is problematic.

Nonetheless, this book continues to be a great contribution in our understanding of dual language learners. It is a book that I will continue to require in my graduate level courses for bilingual and monolingual speech-language pathologists, and I look forward to the next edition.

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