

***Bilingualism and Identity. Spanish at the crossroads with other languages.***

**Mercedes Niño-Murcia and Jason Rothman (eds) (2008)**

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For any researcher, student or teacher working on language and identity in general, and on bilingualism and identity specifically this book is a must-read. Using the most up-to-date methods in collecting data, the writers have presented an unprecedented piece of work on the complex and often misunderstood relationship between language and identity. More precisely the book aims to shed light on how language choice in bilinguals reflects an aspect of their identity, and to analyse the reasons behind the choices made by the speaker.

This volume is unique in that it concentrates on one language, Spanish. This is unique: no other volume to date has presented such comprehensive findings on one language in different contact situations. It allows the authors to examine the effects of multilingualism/bilingualism whilst the language is kept constant, and it can of course be used as a model for other languages. The first major advantage of this approach is that one language is presented in a variety of socio-geographic situations (dominant, not dominant, minority) and the reader is therefore able to appreciate variation in the link between identity and language. There is the presentation of Spanish in the Basque country (Azurmendi, Larranga and

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Apaltegi, p. 36) and in Catalonia (Boix-Fuster and Sanz, p. 88) or even Spanish L2 dominance (Sánchez, p. 109) and dual language emersion (Shenk, p. 221), these are examples of the types of specialised chapters found in the book. As the authors point out, this type of method of looking at one language in its different socio-geographic circumstances ‘...brings much to bear on the construction of linguistic identity’ (p. 13). The other advantage to this is that once the language background, lexical, phonological and semantic properties are presented in one part of the book, the other chapters do not need to re-state these facts and need only comment on the slight differences due to the geographic and contact situations. This then allows for most of the effort, on part of the writers, to be invested in presenting the results in a more detailed fashion and this way the authors fulfil the aims set out at the beginning of the book- that is to illustrate Spanish linguistic identity in different contact situations.

The book is divided into five parts, under which relevant studies are grouped according to their contact situations and geographic regions. These are: Theoretical background, Spanish in contact with autonomous languages in Spain, Spanish in contact with Creole and Ameridian languages, Spanish in contact with English in the United States, and finally the conclusion. The book is highly organised and easy to follow because of this themed approach.

Each chapter begins with a point of argument and emphasizes the controversy and summary of the issue at hand in that particular chapter. Then the relevant theory and background is presented and the context of this controversy is also addressed, in relation to the status of the language. This is effective because it engages the reader and provides adequate information about the topic whilst offering a stimulating and challenging discussion on the various connected topics. It is a heavy book and requires the reader’s attention throughout the reading of each chapter. It is not a book where one can dip in and dip out and claim to have a good understanding of the subject at hand; rather one needs to read through it carefully. However, the book does explain the frameworks in detail and in some chapters the historical developments of the frameworks are explained in a clear way, allowing for a better understanding of the subjects and issues.

The relationship between bilingualism and identity is a topic that has been looked at from different disciplines during the last few decades. It is crucial for researchers in social sciences to understand how identity is reflected through language use, choice and preference. The authors claim that this is most important in this unprecedented current climate of ‘mass marketing of globalised identities and spread of killer English’ (Zentella, p. 3). The fact that many languages are facing extinction ‘linguistic discrimination, even annihilation’ because of the global English, makes it important to understand the relationship between a language and a person’s identity. If language is so intertwined with

identity, what is the effect on the speaker when their language is lost or is in the process of being lost? They suggest and question that it is because of the loss of identity through the loss of language, that the world is faced with all types of insecurities such as 'social or religious intolerance' (p. 3)?

The authors discuss questions and issues such as: how are people affected if their language is deemed secondary or unimportant (Loureiro-Rodríguez, p. 63)? How is their language choice affected if it is the dominant/non-dominant language (Bullock and Toribio, p. 175 and Sánchez, p. 111)? What message is being communicated to the audience/hearers when a speaker chooses one language over another when both parties share all languages in question (French, p. 127, Potowski, p. 201)?

The authors note that '...language use is key in the process of negotiating identity(ies), and not a mere artefact of the speakers' membership in social entities, and constitutes the basis of research presented in this volume' (p. 12). The authors have not fallen into the trap of illustrating or attempting to present an arbitrary relationship between language and identity. Instead all chapters approach identity as a 'constructed' notion and as such one that is constantly under formation, reformation, negotiation and renegotiation. Identity, here, is treated as a fluid, non-static, non-concrete and an ever-changing entity, and this allows for the wider research community to view language as the medium by which such realities are reflected (Niño-Murcia and Rothman, p. 17). There is however, an emphasis from the very beginning that language is not the only determiner of identity, but that it is one of the most powerful mediums by which an abstract notion such as identity can be measured. Here there is a shift from the essentialist idea of identity to a more constructivist approach, without however completely dismissing all the foundations and contributions of essentialism. The book views identity as a result of action, rather than action being the result of an identity, and for this reason there is much emphasis on the notion of a 'community of practice' (Niño-Murcia and Rothman, p. 13). The idea that people gather (habitually) for a common goal and that it is through their action that they become.

As a research student in the sub-field of language and identity, reading this book gave me a clear insight into the current state of the field of language, bilingualism and linguistic identity. From a personal perspective, what was most appealing was the fact that from the onset of the book the issues were thought provoking, questions posed were challenging and relevant in the current ever-developing major field of applied linguistics. Most importantly and as an example of good research practice, from the start of the book the authors make clear that in order to truly understand the relationship between language and identity, the methodology used needs to be robust, reliable and one that can be externally verified. The book's world view is that it is

not acceptable to make unfounded claims about the relationship between language and identity, emphasising that in the research climate today the methodology needs to justify the results and the results the methodology. Such a call raises the bar of effective and reliable methodologies in the field of research as a whole and in the field of applied linguistics and bilingualism specifically.

The book does not only call for a new way of looking at this relationship through the employment of a new approach and innovative methodology, it goes further and suggests a possible candidate. According to the authors, the ideal approach integrates findings of previous studies in child language acquisition, bilingualism, sociolinguistics, phonology, morphology, and psycholinguistics. Zentella (p. 4) and Zentella (1995, 1997) suggests that in order for the researcher to take into consideration the individual and unique situations of their research environment and subjects, in a non-judgemental way whilst bearing in mind previous frameworks, an 'anthro-political' framework should be used. She calls this the 'anthro-political approach which is described as: '... [a] linguistic perspective to incorporate the ideologies and socio-political structures that determine the value of specific languages and the status of their speakers' (pp. 4–5). There is a further more urgent call for all labels that are deemed to account for this relationship (between language and identity) to be defined as clearly as possible. Since most of these definitions already exist whether loosely and blurred or with set boundaries, and in different fields of study; therefore any new development needs to define these already familiar words clearly and precisely, if innovation and a new understanding is to take place. Zentella (p. 1) and Niño-Murcia and Rothman (pp. 11–13) explore ideas such as, what does bilingual really mean? How much of a language must you know in order to be classed as a bilingual? What does identity mean? Which sense of these words are we using?

Such challenging and daring propositions make for authentic and candid findings and illustrate the book's genuine intention and aim of attaining a true picture of the subject at hand. Although, the book points to some weaknesses in previous frameworks it does not altogether ignore the ground-breaking contributions of those frameworks.

In conclusion, this book is an excellent source for research students and scholars in the field of bilingualism and identity. It can also be used as a teaching manual because of the detail of each contact situation; it will give those new to the subject a good grounding and introduction. Although much has been written on the topic, the fresh, clean approach of the book is a welcome addition to the field (whether bilingualism or identity studies) because of its clear presentation of the most crucial, difficult and often dense aspects of this very complex subject.