BOOK REVIEW

Multilingualism, Multiprocesses, Multidevelopment, and Multicontexts in Sign Language Production


This book discusses the different contexts of signers’ language. It considers “multi” language experiences of deaf and hearing signers of various ages, and those growing up with sign language impairment, sign language disorders, deaf autism, dementia and those living in bimodal bilingual contexts. Contexts rarely discussed. This book brings together studies of cases that impact language processing. The contexts described are atypical in some way, but they address the reality of what is present among the deaf community. This book is interdisciplinary with linguists, psychologists, and psychiatrists discussing the “multi” phenomena observed in the different cases in which sign language plays a role.

Quinto-Pozos provides a synthesis of the differences and similarities of disorders and impairment among all language users irrespective of modality, to introduce what is specific to sign language production. Independent of modality, signers, and speakers may be affected by dementia, aphasia, or brain injury. However, signers manipulate space as part of their language grammar or topographic visual representation, which is not observed with users of a spoken language. These similarities and differences impact language development. Each contributing author addresses aspects of these similarities and differences in some way. The effects of sign language modality may be positive in some cases of language impairment, for example, with the suggestions that iconicity could facilitate both perception and production of signs. Signing children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder present a very specific sign language disorder related to incorrect palm orientation or movement direction. Another example is atypical language production in older deaf signers with dementia, who struggle to find the right signs (words) and make grammatical mistakes and inappropriate pragmatic productions. Stuttering and sign dysarthria are reported, showing specificities of sign articulation, but with some common aspects observed in analogous speech disorders.

This book also considers hearing children who grow up with deaf parents and acquire signed and spoken language. In this special context, sign and speech can be articulated simultaneously. It is a bilingual, but also bimodal context, as both languages are available at the same time, in different modalities. It is a multilingual context that creates multicultural interaction between deaf and hearing worlds. The main modality effect observed is that these children can produce both languages at the same time, a kind of “code-mixing” as “code-blending.”

An important concern is the methodological aspects and difficulties that can arise from researching language disorders. Some authors emphasize the need to distinguish between the effects of late sign language acquisition and the deficits in language processing or aspects related to memory that are part of language disorders. Ethical issues also arise, especially since the Deaf community is very small and researchers must ensure they avoid embarrassing anyone within the community. The choice and/or design of tests are important, as well as validity and reliability measures, since no standardized tests exist to diagnose sign language disorders.

This is a valuable resource for researchers in sign language and Deaf education, bringing a precious combination of research on different sign language impairment studies in “multi” contexts, considering comprehension and production.

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