The exploration of multilingualism: Development of research on L3, multilingualism and multiple language acquisition*

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The past 20 years have seen an unprecedented upsurge of interest in multilingualism. A major reason for this is no doubt the acknowledgement by a growing number of researchers that the use of more than two languages is far more common than was previously thought. The exact number of multilinguals around the world is unknown. However, we know that there are approximately 6,000 languages at this time being spoken in the world (Grimes, 1992). Since there are only 203 countries in the world, simple mathematics tells us that many countries must, in one way or another, be bi- or multilingual (Dewaele, Housen & Wei, 2003). An investigation of the phenomenon of multilingualism and multiple language acquisition, therefore, has not only a huge theoretical significance but also has great practical importance. Thus, in this context, I suggest that it would be both interesting and useful to present a volume focusing on the concept of multilingualism containing a number of theoretical papers and experimental studies which include data from various parts of the globe. This volume also focuses on some major aspects of trilingualism from diverse theoretical and methodological points of view which have been written by internationally renowned scholars.

It seems that the motivation for this anthology has risen from two issues:

(1) the growing interest in multicultural societies due to rising worldwide immigration and an increasing interest in ethnic minorities and their language problems, particularly in the field of education from socio-linguistic, linguistic, and psycholinguistic points of views.

(2) the necessity to reconsider research methods applied to bilingual studies and emergent methodology which especially fits the specific nature of multilingual studies and reflects its cross-discipline nature.

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Main topics
This volume discusses: (a) current debates on and approaches toward definition of multilingualism with regard to significant differences between bilingualism and multilingualism; (b) the development of research in multilingualism; (c) the history and development of psycholinguistic research on cross-linguistic influence and transfer, and language typology and proximity within the multilingual context; (d) emerging new research methods; (e) current issues in multilingual education; (f) current and future research directions in multilingualism.

Relevance to the Israeli context
Given that there is a unique language situation in Israel that represents one of the more complex cases of a multilingual and multicultural society, I hope that this book will be especially relevant in the context of our country. This context includes the coexistence of two official languages, Hebrew and Arabic (the language of the largest ethnic minority in Israel), English that is widely used in numerous contexts (especially in "academia", economics and politics), and the native languages of large groups of immigrants (e.g., Russian, Amharic, Spanish, French and scores of others). This situation along with considerable changes in political and social attitudes toward multiculturalism in modern Israeli society motivated the interest in the issues discussed in the book.

Intended readership
This book is suitable for scholars and students of linguistics, language teaching, education, sociology and psychology; with a special interest in tri- and multilingualism and in multicultural societies. This volume was written in particular for researchers, educators and policy makers.

References