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Steven Brown and Jodi Eisterhold. *Topics in Language and Cultures for Teachers*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004. 211p.

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This is an excellent book for college students, beginning graduate students, and teachers in training who want to gain a deep understanding of the relationship between language and culture “using sociolinguistics and educational perspectives” (xi). Any person interested in multicultural studies and curious about language phenomena will find the book both fascinating and an excellent resource. The authors clearly explain theoretical material, define terms in some detail, and furnish concrete examples that help the reader reflect on his or her personal experience and cultural knowledge. Overall, this book serves as an important teaching tool that helps students carry out thorough analyses of and gain insights into their own cultures and cultures of the world, as well as understand how people learn and use verbal and nonverbal communication to transmit their messages.

The book is organized into ten major chapters, each of which lists several clear objectives. The opening chapter helps the student understand the difference between stereotype and generalization and the very fine line that divides these two concepts. It challenges the reader to be aware of his/her own conceptions about specific social groups and encourages a rejection of ethnocentrism or “the view that one’s own culture is the only way to be and is therefore superior” (6). In this way the student will gain tools to become a successful communicator in a global world.

The book presents explanations about how humans develop language skills; these include most important theories on first and second language acquisition, from Noam Chomsky’s primary concept of a Language Acquisition Device (LAD) to his theory of Generative Grammar. Besides this, the book explains the relevance of the fields of sociolinguistics and pragmatics in the understanding of how humans process language structure and are active members of a speech community. The authors clearly explain the strong relationship between language and culture by defining the notion of “communicative competence” to include both the speaker’s knowledge of linguistic rules and the socio-cultural rules of appropriate use. Communicative competence is linked to the knowledge of speech acts, which in turn represent highly complex norms of communication. This complexity is due to the fact that linguistic, social, and pragmatic knowledge must work together harmoniously in order for a speech act to be successfully understood, as well as for cultural misunderstandings, communication breakdowns, and pragmatic failure to be avoided. The book provides specific pragmatic samples of communication from different cultures around the

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world to illustrate that each speech community has its own rules of conversation and concept of politeness.

The authors emphasize the importance of socialization or belonging to a culture, analyzing the effect of differences in culture on a child's educational opportunities. This is relevant information for teachers who face a multicultural teaching environment and have the task of helping students explore new cultures so that they may become citizens of the world. To their credit, the authors of the book clearly acknowledge that this goal cannot be fully accomplished without the help of parents.

The book extensively addresses language contact between individuals and cultures, where students can grasp the different phenomena that occur when people actively and creatively use a language, clearly showing that language is a dynamic system always subjected to change and not simply a fixed set of vocabulary and grammar rules. Among these phenomena, the book describes code switching, the formation of pidgins and Creole, word borrowings, and language death.

The authors also address cultural transformation and factors that contribute to it, stating, "culture can also change as a result of discovery or invention...cultures may also change as a result of borrowing or what anthropologists call diffusion; [another factor] is assimilation [or] the adoption of another culture by choice or necessity" (105). This part is complemented by a description of culture shock, a very practical and common stage that many people experience when they are immersed in a new culture. Detailed descriptions of bilingualism, diglossia, multilingualism, language policy, and language maintenance follow. All of these components give the student a clear knowledge and understanding of the linguistic reality that all of us face, which is a world in need of multicultural and multilingual citizens who can foster bonds of peace and understanding among the different cultures of the world.

In keeping with the stated objectives of giving students and teachers a broad and complete understanding of the language system, each with a strong bond to its culture and speakers, the book dedicates a whole chapter to "varieties of language, ethnicity, social class, age and how these interactions affect educational opportunity" (118). All of these topics are extremely pertinent to understanding the extent to which a speech community and a culture itself are heterogeneous. In this way, students will be encouraged to see the diversity within their own cultures and appreciate their richness.

The final part of the book describes non-oral communication, including nonverbal communication, sign languages, and literacy. All of these are relevant topics that give students a full understanding of the diverse acts of communication.

One of the most engaging aspects of reading this book is the fact that theory is constantly being connected with real-life experiences. In this way the book leads

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the reader to carefully scrutinize his/her own ideas about culture, language and human interaction, come to terms with his/her erroneous perspectives, and develop a sensitive awareness towards the analysis of any culture or speech community. All of this is facilitated largely through six very important sections at the end of each chapter. The first section, titled "Teaching Scenarios," stresses the most important teaching points of the chapter. The second, "Check Your Knowledge," contains questions that help the students summarize what they learned in the chapter. The third, "Apply Your Knowledge," introduces questions for field study that encourage students to apply the theory they learned in the chapter toward data collection or another project. The fourth section, "Reflect," gives the student the opportunity to probe further into an analysis of the theory by encouraging him/her to gain personal insights. The fifth, "Expand Your Knowledge," leads the student toward independent research. The final section, titled "Suggested Reading," gives students bibliographical information with an eye to enhancing their understanding of the chapter, encouraging them to explore possible areas of future research, and/or narrowing their topics of investigation.

The general public, teachers, students, and scholars will find the book exceptionally informative, full of examples taken from real life as well as probing questions that will guide the reader to a detailed analysis of the system of language and cultures around the world. The book remains an excellent tool for an introductory course in linguistics and to help the reader gain a better understanding of his or her social role as citizen of the world. ✧