
communities. Certainly, as the essays in the collection investigate varied ethical beliefs and challenge long-held popular moral assumptions, there are those who will disagree with all or part of any analysis. It is, however, the often-challenging nature of the collection that makes it an important addition to the current critical discussion of children's literature.

Juan-Carlos Moreno and José-Luis Mendívil-Giró. *On Biology, History and Culture in Human Language: A Critical Overview*. Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2014. 181 p.

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Any book that begins with Dante has to be good. Juan-Carlos Moreno and José-Luis Mendívil-Giró refer to Dante's distinction between vernacular and literary languages. In his practice as a writer, of course, Dante ironically used literary Latin to praise the vernacular in his *De Vulgari Eloquentia* but the vernacular to rival the Homeric Greek and the Virgilian Latin in his *Commedia*. Moreno and Mendívil-Giró do not mention this irony but use the Dante reference to establish the fundamental difference between natural language (NL) and cultivated language (CL), which underlies their main argument (that the Chomskyan Minimalist Program is the right way to do theoretical linguistics) at a much more abstract level.

The authors continually contrast what they call the current "two great 'paradigms' of language research" (44). First, the *biolinguistic paradigm* is based on Chomsky's assumption of a Universal Grammar (UG), the paradigm the authors embrace. Second, the *functional-cognitive paradigm* does not necessarily deny "the human capacity for language" (40) but understands this capacity as part of more general cognitive systems, rather than as a specifically "linguistic" system. The "big picture" contrast is *natural* versus *cultural*. But looking at the specifics discussed, I sensed a relatively fine distinction between the two paradigms that seem to share a good deal of common ground so that future research may promise a better answer than a theoretical decision at the current time. However, Moreno and Mendívil-Giró argue that the two paradigms are different enough in terms of how each views language so that their respective research programs are significantly different. And this difference hinges on the distinction between NL and CL.

First, the linguistic competence that each child acquires without explicit instruction is that individual child's (and, later, adult's) *I-language*, which is contingent on Universal Grammar. Second, a NL is understood as "a population" of I-languages (7). Third, a CL (such as any written language) is "the product of certain partial elaborations of" a NL; as a result of its explicit rules, a CL is not acquired but learned (9). A CL, therefore, is always an *E-language*, that is, an external manifestation of "certain linguistic behaviors ... during the performance of our" NL (17) in a cultural, social context. NLs evolve in a non-teleological (Darwinian) way while CLs evolve in a teleological (Lamarckian) way.

This distinction results in other distinctions, for example, that of *language evolution* versus *language change*. Language evolution, which occurred on an almost geological timescale probably about 100,000 years ago, refers to the emergence of the *faculty of language* (FL as part of UG), which is specific to *homo sapiens sapiens* and "is shared by all humans, across the species"

(David Lightfoot, qtd. 84). Only then did human “languages” as we know them evolve. Across all linguistic diversity, these “languages” evidence not only the same “degree of complexity” since any later language change does not affect the biological basis, but also, because they are all based on the FL, one and the same language. The functional-cognitive paradigm, which does not assume any form of FL, may lead to very different descriptions and predictions, such as not assuming one (uniform) language but, indeed, various profoundly independent languages that may even exist at different degrees of complexity.

In contrast, language change accounts for the diversity that characterizes the various manifestations of human language (in accordance with UG). Some of these changes occur over short periods of time with language acquisition. Without direct access to the I-languages of adults, a child develops his/her own I-language based on “the linguistic performance” (83) he/she is exposed to. Although linguistic performance is culturally influenced and although the child’s I-language is in essence a new linguistic competence, that is, different from the adults’ I-languages (thus accounting for some language change), “it is clear that this change is a natural process and not a cultural process, since it is based in the biologically conditioned process of natural language acquisition” (83). In this sense, NLs “are not transmitted at all; they are recreated by each new generation of speakers” (142). In this discontinuous view of language change, the history of a language is not about “a series of transformations” from an earlier to a later state of a given language but rather about “a series of ... languages created by each successive generation” (143).

Finally, it follows from these distinctions that the object of linguistic studies should be at a fairly abstract level and be consistent with the biological basis of language: To understand the true nature of human language, linguists should study I-languages, not E-languages (studying the latter may yield other insights). Moreno and Mendivil-Giró clearly argue in favor of this strong biological approach to linguistics.

Their argument is complex, so here I focus on the central issue of language evolution versus language change as an example of their discussion. It is intriguing to anyone who is open to both sides of the issue. My sense that there is only a very fine distinction between *natural* and *cultural* paradigms is compounded by Moreno and Mendivil-Giró’s very narrow application of the two concepts. There are also a few more issues. For example, the authors understand NLs in terms of “complexity theory,” that is, the study of nonlinear systems. Or, for example, the discussions of language and brain systems are grounded in cognitive sciences, which are also claimed by the functional-cognitive paradigm (and, probably in a more independent manner, by the field of embodied cognition). I would have appreciated some elaboration on these points.

As a cultural artifact, presented in the highly cultivated written language of specified scholarly discourse (in English), *On Biology, History and Culture in Human Language* also needs to be assessed in the context of the principles and parameters of this CL. In this respect, the book would benefit from some improvements. One outlier was the quote from Saussure, given only in French without English translation (25). In book-length essays, I am always torn about how to react to the dual issues of focus and repetition; it is either planned redundancy or sloppy editing. For example, after reading the discussion around page 83, the reader has to wait until page 142 for the complete picture on language change. Also, the three-part index (names, subjects, and languages) does not provide sufficient details for the subjects index. For example, “recursion” as part of UG is a (perhaps, *the*) feature that separates human from animal

languages according to Chomskyan linguistics. As a result, Dan Everett's claim that Pirahã does not have recursion caused quite a stir. Both Everett's name and the Amazonian language Pirahã are listed (for pages 75 and 131); however, "recursion" is not in the index at all (but it is also discussed on other pages, such as pages 45 and 114).

Overall, Moreno and Mendivil-Giró deliver what they promise as early as in their book's subtitle. They provide a critical overview of studying language as a biological phenomenon versus a cultural one. Since we probably do have to wait quite a while for conclusive results as to which paradigm is the correct one, this book serves an important purpose: It updates the reader, from the critical position of the Minimalist Program, on the the current state of the theoretical debate on nature and culture in linguistics.

Kent Nelson. *The Spirit Bird*. U of Pittsburgh P, 2014. 318p.

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Spirit Bird follows a well-established precedent by author and self-proclaimed birder, Kent Nelson, of incorporating his knowledge of all things avian seamlessly into his narratives as he has done in previous works such as *The Land That Moves* and *Language in the Blood*. Whether they inspire an entire narrative or a single paragraph, each introduction to a Bluethroat, a Sun-bittern or any other from the myriad of birds in the collection is illuminating, but also vital to each of the thirteen stories.

The characters are just as diverse as the species of birds in the book running the gamut from a millionaire-cum-literal donkey to migrant workers and everything in between. Kent's love of the land is evident in his descriptions of the landscapes that go beyond the cursory and are just as vivid if not more so than those of actual characters. In fact, one could argue Kent's love for the outdoors serves to flesh-out nature, whether intentionally or not, as the one consistent character in the book taking on a different reincarnations in each story, sometimes the provider, other times the victim, other times the artist's subject and other times still a passive onlooker.

All of the stories are set in the here and now and readers will be able to recognize current issues, the most relevant being the osmotic Mexican-American border, which although mentioned in passing in other stories, is nowhere as prominent as in the collection's first story *Alba*. A young man by the name of Último Vargas who believes himself to be destined for great things, crosses the border like his estranged father before him into Hatch, New Mexico. With an entrepreneurial spirit from the very beginning, he overcomes setback after setback in an effort to actualize his self-prophesized greatness. In *The Path of the Left Hand*, Myron, a pharmacist who has been married for thirty-three years begins to reflect on his life and the proverbial road not taken, the road in this case being his latent homosexuality. The story takes some surprising turns as Myron decides to explore this facet of his sexuality that he has stifled for so long.

Compared to the other twelve stories, *Joan of Dreams* stands as the odd man out in terms of style. Kent takes a more poetic approach to the narration which is apropos because the main