

Book Reviews

An Advanced Guide to Multilingualism

by Larissa Aronin

Edinburgh University Press (2022) xiv + 233 pp. Paperback, ¥4,800, ISBN: 978-0748635641

An Advanced Guide to Multilingualism provides an accessible “panoramic perspective” (p. 1) of the multi-faceted phenomenon of Multilingualism. The book’s well-credentialed author, Professor Larissa Aronin, has taught numerous graduate and undergraduate courses related to the field, in various countries and in multiple languages. She is also extensively published in the area, and serves as an editorial board member on a number of international peer-reviewed journals. Aronin has attempted to write an introductory text, covering the key aspects of multilingualism, that should be of interest to “those who specialize in education, linguistics, translation, language teaching and language policy” (p. 3).

Importantly, and of particular relevance to the *JJMM* readership, Aronin plants a red flag at the start of the book. She argues that while *bilingualism* and *multilingualism* (which she defines as “the use and acquisition of two languages” and “the use and acquisition of three and more languages” [p. 12] respectively) are obviously overlapping fields of academic enquiry, there also exist “several meaningful differences between the two” (p. 13). Aronin states that “while topics relating to bilingualism and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) will necessarily be discussed in this textbook, these are not exhaustively presented ... and will be included to the extent that they have relevance to multilingualism” (p. 2). It is this focus on multilingualism—rather than bilingualism—that differentiates this book from well-known texts on bilingualism such as Myer-Scotton’s (2006) *Multiple Voices: An Introduction to Bilingualism* and Ng and Wigglesworth’s (2007) *Bilingualism: An Advanced Resource Book*.

An Advanced Guide to Multilingualism is structured for use as a course textbook that could easily be used in a 15-week graduate course in Japan. The book contains 12 chapters, divided into five parts. The structure of each chapter is uniform, consisting of a *text* (i.e., reading) section and a *learning/teaching* (i.e., exercise) section. After completing the text section, the reader/student is invited to respond to a number of reflexive questions and exercises, such as completing a learning table for definitions of key words and concepts, preparing short presentations on suggested topics, and the like. Each chapter also contains a summary, as well as recommendations for further reading. There is also an online companion website, maintained by the publisher, with an updated glossary.

Part I, titled “The Field of Multilingualism,” spans the first three chapters. Chapter 1, “What is Multilingualism?,” provides a solid introduction to the discipline. In Chapter 2, “Multilingualism as an Exceptional Resource,” Aronin “draws on linguistics, biology, SLA, applied linguistics and globalization studies” (p. 27) to highlight multilingualism as a fascinating and extraordinary human resource. A concise explanation of *language universals* (the characteristics all languages share) is provided here, as well as an overview of some basic differences between languages. Chapter 3, “Multilingualism as a Modern Reality and Field of Knowledge,” maps the linear progression of our understanding of language, from one that was initially monolingual in its assumptions and outlook, to one that recognized the positive advantages of bilingualism, and finally, due largely to the forces of globalization, to one that recognizes both the similarities and differences between bilinguals and multilinguals.

“Languages” is the title of Part II, which spans the next two chapters. Chapter 4, “Languages of the World,” explains the sometimes contentious political and social distinctions between languages and dialects. This chapter also touches on the notions of language standardization, codification, linguistic distance (proximity), pidgins and creoles, and World Englishes. Next, in Chapter 5, “Classification of Languages,” various criteria for classifying languages are introduced.

“Multilingualism in Society” is the focus of Part III. In “Multilingualism at the Societal Level” (Chapter 6), concepts such as language contact, linguistic borrowing, diglossia, and language domains are explained. Here, Aronin asserts that “only a handful of countries—for instance Japan and Iceland—may now be seen as matching the ‘one nation—one language’ principle, due to their very strong sense of national identity and shared language” (pp. 99-100). Whilst this “sense” is, of course, pervasive in Japan, it should be noted *JJMM* has worked strenuously over the years to challenge and problematize this erroneous perception of Japan. Chapter 7, “Societal Multilingualism: Countries and Regions,” examines linguistic diversity in and between countries, and explains the concept of the Language Diversity Index.

Part IV is titled “Individual Multilingualism.” Chapter 8 lays out the psycholinguistic and cognitive dimensions of multilingualism for the individual, contrasting bilingual and multilingual language development through these lenses. Then, in Chapter 9, “Individual Multilingualism: Social Dimensions,” various trajectories of multilingual people are described. Of particular interest here to readers of *JJMM* will be the discussion of the challenges and choices that parents face when attempting to raise children multilingually.

Finally, Part V of this book is titled “How we Experience and Study Multilingualism.” Chapter 10, “The Ways We Experience, Treat, and Use Languages”, introduces the concepts of *language nominations* (e.g., official language, mother language, minority language, etc.), *language repertoires*, *Dominant Language Constellations*, *translanguaging*, and *code switching*. Chapter 11, “Methods of Studying Multilingualism,” distinguishes between research methodology and research philosophy, the two tenets of research design. Distinctions between pure and applied research, positivist and interpretive approaches, longitudinal and cross-sectional research, and quantitative and qualitative research are also drawn. Finally, Chapter 12, “Models of Multilingualism”, introduces several of the more prominent models of multilingualism. In general, this section is primarily a theoretical one, setting it apart from works such as Wei and Moyer’s (2008) *The Blackwell Guide to Research Methods in Bilingualism and Multilingualism*, which is more practical in tone.

An Advanced Guide to Multilingualism skillfully canvasses fundamental aspects of the wide-ranging and multifaceted phenomenon of multilingualism. Its introductory texts on various topics, coupled with valuable suggestions for further reading, will be of great use to students, teachers, and researchers alike. As such, it is highly recommended.

Reviewed by Lachlan Jackson
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References

- Myers-Scotton, C. (2006). *Multiple voices: An introduction to bilingualism*. Blackwell.
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- Wei, L., & Moyer, M. G. (2008). *The Blackwell guide to research methods in bilingualism and multilingualism*. Blackwell.

Multilingualism: A Very Short Introduction

by John C. Maher

Oxford University Press (2017) 148 pp. \$11.95, £7.99, ISBN: 9780198724995

The Oxford series of *Very Short Introductions* now boasts more than 760 titles, from *Abolitionism* to *Zionism*, via *Geoffrey Chaucer* and *Prehistory*. Each seeks to give a succinct and enticing overview of its subject and is aimed at readers with a serious interest in reading themselves into a new field. John C. Maher, of Tokyo's International Christian University has contributed the volume on multilingualism, squeezed in between *Muhammad* and *Music and Technology*.

This is not the kind of introduction you would give to a parent-in-law who is worried that your insistence on a bilingual upbringing is scrambling the brain of their beloved grandchild. For that, we have Beck and Sako's *The ABC's of Bilingualism* (2002). Rather, it is the kind of book you will want to pore over with your graduate students in their *Intro. to Bi-/Multilingualism* course. Alternatively, it is just the kind of book that would allow, say, a language teacher with a potentially multilingual home, to gain a quick understanding of just what is involved in the field of multilingualism and where to find out more.

It is not exactly an easy read. Certainly, the style is engaging, the humour abundant, and the illustrative anecdotes telling. But there is just so much information, so many allusions and signposts in multiple directions on each page, that it requires a careful and deliberate approach. The book, at 148 pages, is indeed short, but the reader may well find that an attentive read requires more time and concentration than many a weightier tome.

Like all the books in this series, it is attractively presented. Small enough to be, literally, a pocket book, it is lighter and more portable than a smart-phone. With a decently large type-face on crisp, white paper, the text is broken up into chapters, sub-sections, lists, "boxes" that present examples, and, on occasion, black-and-white photographs. All this in a soft but secure binding.

There are nine chapters in all, followed by a thorough list of references, helpful suggestions for further readings on the topic of each chapter, and a brief but indispensable index. In addressing the reader, the author does not shy away from technical terms (*diglossia*, *equilingualism*, *ethnolect*) but is careful to explain them in context. The explanations are often brief and passing; terms are defined but often not mentioned again, which is why the index is so valuable. Examples of both linguistic and social phenomena are drawn from languages and societies around the world, with hardly a trace of the Euro-centrism that sometimes characterised the work of a previous generation of scholars.

Chapter 1, "A Multilingual World," places multilingualism where it belongs: at the centre of the human experience. It is not treated as exotic or esoteric but as something we have all experienced, though we may not have thought deeply about it at the time. "The Causes of Multilingualism," the second chapter, of course begins with Babel, but also tells Mayan and Hindu stories about the origins of diversity in human languages, before moving on to consider more modern engines of diversity: annexation, migration, religion, colonialism, together with economic factors and transnational communities.

Chapter 3, "Multilingualism, Myth, and Controversies," first explains and then dispels six myths that can cloud our perception of multilingualism. From multilingualism as a curse, a barrier to global peace, as unnatural and unnecessary (given the global dominance of English), Maher goes on to give similar consideration to the myths that multilingualism is just too expensive to sustain or a part of the "failed project" (p. 41) of multiculturalism. In dealing with the last myth, in particular, the reader is aware of both the astute mind and the clarity of expression the author is deploying.

With the undergrowth now definitively cleared away, Chapter 4, “People, Language, and Dangerous Things,” moves towards the true topic of the book: the everydayness of multilingualism. It presents a series of vignettes of people, some famous, others not, who use multiple languages in their daily lives. Many readers will begin to recognise the multilingualism of people they know, have met, or follow on social media, as they work through the stories of entertainers, sports professionals, writers, and readers who live or have lived with multiple languages.

Chapter 5, “Individual Multilingualism: One Mind, Many Languages,” moves inside the heads of multilingual people and their families. It is here that those of us who have taken an interest in our children’s bilingual development will recognise many terms and ideas from our reading: *positive* and *negative bilingualism*, *cognitive development*, *one-parent-one-language*, *code-switching*. It is here, too, that we will find reassurance if we ever have doubts that, as one of the subtitles has it: “Multilingualism is Good for You.”

The following chapter, “Politics, Language, and the State,” moves on to look at multilingual on a societal level and pays particular attention to multilingual nation states. The twin strands of nation building and language planning are intertwined here, as Maher shows himself to be just as dexterous when dealing with the politics of language as he is with the issues for the individual that are inherent in multilingualism.

The chapter heading “Language and Identity” speaks for itself. The overview of language, belonging, identity, and culture is rather more theoretical than some of the other chapters, as indeed is this area of study itself, but Maher never lets us lose sight of how the theoretical constructs and issues play out at both the national and individual level.

These three chapters, 5 through 7, really form the core of this *Very Short Introduction*. In less than 60 pages, they lay out the central issues of the field, link them to everyday experience, and provide a theoretical basis for future exploration. If you were to use the book in a very short course, these would be the chapters to focus on.

Chapter 8 deals with lingua franca, hybrids, and constructed languages (like Esperanto), while the final chapter focuses on endangered languages. These are pretty much stand-alone topics that can be approached in the context of the whole book or dealt with individually. The explanations are just as lucid and the examples just as rooted as in the rest of the book.

What does the book not cover? Well, there might have been a little more on psycholinguistics and there is certainly more to be said from the exciting perspective of brain science and the growing understanding emerging from it of just how multiple linguistic systems interact in the brain, how they are in turn deployed and suppressed, and ultimately how the brain does language. This said, these are fast moving fields that even much more extensive works have trouble keeping up with.

Really, then, the book cannot be faulted. It provides just what it says on the cover, and does so in a way that captures readers’ attention and leaves them wanting more. It will never answer all your, or your students’, questions about multilingualism but it will leave you asking better questions, knowing where to pursue the answers, and with a clearer idea of how the topics of interest in this wide-ranging field interact.

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Reference

- Beck, A., & Sako, K. (Eds.). (2002). *The ABC's of bilingualism*. Japan Association for Language Teaching Bilingualism Special Interest Group.
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