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Book Review

An advanced guide to multilingualism

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As a researcher in multilingualism and multilinguality, I always await any new publications by Larissa Aronin. They not only add to our understanding and knowledge of this fascinating field, but also inspire us to look into the various dimensions not yet explored by other researchers. A truly imaginative and inspiring mind, hers has been a significant contribution to models of multiple language acquisition, the theory of affordances (Singleton & Aronin, 2007), and the material culture of multilingualism, not to forget – what I consider to be her biggest and most fascinating area of research – dominant language constellations (Aronin & Vetter, 2021; Lo Bianco & Aronin, 2020,) and also, fairly recently and still at the developmental stage, the philosophy of multilingualism (Aronin & Politis, 2015).

The book *An Advanced Guide to Multilingualism* consists of five parts divided into sections and detailed subsections delineating the areas under discussion. The publication starts with a “Foreword” by Muiris Ó Laoire, a long-standing co-researcher, whose comment on the book would alone suffice as a positive review of this publication and which makes it difficult for me to add to what the readers will find in his text. But as a reviewer I will try to expand on these comments. In

the introduction that follows, Aronin justifies her choice of topic. Readers will also find here a detailed description of the contents of the publication and a very extensive presentation of ideas for teachers, students or, more generally, multilinguals on how the book could be put to use, given the clear and well-designed structure of the chapters. Each chapter contains not only a content-focused part but also a summary, further reading suggestions, a chapter review as well as reflective questions and exercises for classroom or individual use.

In Part I of the book “The field of multilingualism,” a detailed discussion of the phenomenon of multilingualism is offered, starting with its definition, which appears to be simple but has brought about multiple controversies and ongoing disagreements among scholars. Aronin’s understanding is that multilingualism is different from bilingualism and her forceful arguments do justice to such a belief. Following the assumption that being multilingual seems to be natural to people, as about one-third of humanity is multilingual, even though this applies more to some geographical areas than others (Gabryś-Barker, 2022), her in-depth analysis seems well-justified. Aronin points out that in her discussion she will focus both on individual multilingualism as determined by unique “multilinguals’ life trajectories” (p. 14) and societal multilingualism, as dictated by the language policies and practices of a given country. It is important to point out that multilingualism, so much promoted these days, is not new and that multilinguality was rife in ancient times, as many historical sources demonstrate (e.g., Clackson, 2015). Larissa Aronin presents the readers with a brief overview of historical multilingualism, emphasizing that studying multilingualism requires a multidisciplinary perspective embracing the various scholarly methods of linguistics, sociolinguistics, as well as linguistic ethnography and anthropology. It is the domain of language use by people in various contexts. I would also add here the importance of psycholinguistics as significant for the multilinguality of individuals. Multilingualism is seen by Aronin as a unique resource comprising a whole array of features of all languages (i.e., language universals) and linguistic characteristics of individual languages (e.g., scripts, numerals, color terms, time and space terms), which have only attracted scholarly attention in the last few decades. Language study and study of its use have gone through the phases of monolingual, bilingual and, finally, in more recent times, multilingual focus, leading to a new *linguistic dispensation*, the term promoted by Aronin in her other research and publications (Aronin & Singleton, 2008) and also outlined in this book.

Following the discussion of the nature of multilingualism and its scope as a scholarly domain, emphasis in Part II, titled “Languages,” is shifted to the presentation and discussion of languages of the world as a major resource in multilingualism. I believe that this part of the book is aimed at readers whose knowledge of linguistics is elementary or who want to sharpen their understanding of the nature of

languages. Thus, readers will find here an overview of multilingualism-related terminology and phenomena (e.g., language versus dialect, codification and standardization, language varieties, pidgins and creoles), issues in language distance (e.g., linguistic distance) and also the position of English as a lingua franca. All of these concepts are clearly explained and illustrated with examples. Additionally, the classification of languages is offered from different perspectives – those of structural typology, genetics and sociolinguistics (among others). Importantly, Aronin also discusses at length the evolving character of sign languages and their significance, adding a brief comment on artificial (constructed) languages (of the future?).

In Part III “Multilingualism in society,” Aronin first of all presents basic concepts for this aspect of multilingualism, such as language contact and language convergence (“Sprachbund,” p. 98), (language) borrowing together with its different types in different languages, language domain and speech community (e.g., language community) alongside its different forms. One of the phenomena related to speech community is *diglossia*, a term that has been at issue in scholarly research since the 1950s and much elaborated by Joshua Fishman (1972), to whom Aronin rightly pays tribute in this part of the book. Having discussed the basic terminology, she moves on to the presentation of multilingualism from a geographical perspective, demonstrating language diversity across the world and the different types of multilingualism in existence. There is plenty of information here on multilingual regions such as Africa and India, as pre-eminently multilingual but not without linguistic challenges and problems. Perhaps some more comment could have been made here on the multilinguality of the European continent and the tensions brought about by language and identity conflicts.

Part IV “Individual multilingualism” takes into consideration the other important dimension of multilingualism: what is more personal and unique to an individual. Here the focus is on the psycholinguistic and cognitive aspects of multiple language use by an individual, such as language modes, crosslinguistic interactions observed in learning and performance behaviors of a multilingual, language development across one’s lifespan and the role of age in multilingual development. Also, ideas about early and late multilinguals and the role of language learning in later stages of life (both in healthy and debilitated states) are clearly and coherently discussed here. Aronin supports her discussion with the findings of more than just recent research, which has been quite extensive. The discussion of individual multilinguality is rightly portrayed here not only as a person-related phenomenon, but, importantly, as also having a social dimension related to identity of a multilingual, inevitably functioning in a social context. Research in this field has led to a better understanding of identity based on the complexity of intertwined personal, social and professional factors, an advance which is rightly emphasized in this part of the book. Aronin also sees the impact

of multimodality and “external entities” (p. 140) on identity development, such as, for example, material culture (to which she had made a significant contribution). Additionally, human interaction with technology is another factor in identity building overviewed in this part of the book. We have observed it in our recent experience of the pandemic, our functioning in virtual reality, where technology became an indispensable tool for operating effectively not only in our professional lives but also in social and family contexts, becoming integral to our identities. Aronin once again demonstrates the complexity and challenges of individual multilinguality by presenting the different “trajectories of becoming multilingual” (p. 142) in terms of the order of language acquisition/learning (i.e., simultaneous or successive) or contextually determined, following the typology of Hoffmann (2001). She also raises the issue of how multilingual families function. The reader will find here a brief discussion of esoteric multilinguals, such as the so-called polyglots and savants.

The final part, Part V, “How we experience and study multilingualism,” is the longest in the book. This is not surprising, as it focuses on three fundamentals in multilingualism: language nominations, methods in researching multilingualism and models of multilingualism based on research findings. Firstly, Aronin offers a clarification of terms basic to multilingualism research in relation to so-called language nominations (e.g., the mother tongue, second and foreign language) and their application to existing language practices of multilinguals/multilingual societies. Multilingual language functioning inevitably leads to the emergence of code-switching and translanguaging, two concepts which are also defined and contextualized here. An important part of the discussion of language nominations and languages’ status in a multilingual mind relates to the concepts of language repertoires (LR) and dominant language constellations (DLC), as well as the impact of material culture on multilingual language development and functioning, all of which are explored and clarified with respect to their individual features. Secondly, the reader is presented here with an overview of the research methodology used in various studies derived from certain philosophical assumptions as well as the challenges that researching such a complex phenomenon faces. These methodological approaches embrace quantitative research (i.e., descriptive, correlational, causal/comparative, experimental), language demography (i.e., censuses, surveys), qualitative research (i.e., case study, action research, ethnography), and holistic and complexity research derived from CDTS (complex dynamic systems theory). Even though each of these research paradigms is described in detail, it would perhaps have made this section more interesting if they were illustrated with references to specific studies using these methods and/or combinations of them. Thirdly, the chapter discusses various conceptual explanatory models of multilingualism derived from theoretical assumptions. The models

specific to multilingualism presented by Aronin are: factor model (Brita Hufeisen), dynamic model (Philip Herdina and Ulrike Jessner), role-function model (Sara Williams and Björn Hammarberg), multilingual processing model (Franz-Joseph Meissner), and multilingual modelling in DLC (mentioned earlier). DLC, as an innovative approach representing multilinguality, goes beyond the verbal expression of the earlier models by using visual, olfactory and tactile aspects of language use. This is a very promising, new avenue of research promoted by the Author here and in her other specific publications.

The book closes with a brief "Conclusion" in which Larissa Aronin pinpoints the major tendencies in the study of multilingualism embraced by research, expressed in terms of the need to understand the complexity and diversity of multilingualism and the growing importance of social dimensions in re-defining some traditional concepts in line with new global realities. Each of the tendencies is exemplified and discussed throughout the book. The "Bibliography" of sources cited in the book comprises over 400 publications. These are virtually all of the major (and recent) publications by established scholars in multilingualism, including a broad selection of Aronin's own contribution to the field. Therefore, this part of the book constitutes an excellent resource for all researchers, both those long established and new to the field.

Aronin's *An Advanced Guide to Multilingualism* accessibly puts together theories and facts about multilingualism, incorporating research findings and their implications. It clarifies and defines the key concepts in the field and recognizes its interdisciplinary character. It shows the author's expertise in the field, both with respect to detailed analysis and her ability to present a synthesis of hotly disputed issues in multilingualism and multilinguality. This book is also valuable as it caters equally well for the needs of language students and individuals who may just have an interest in finding out what it is that makes them multilinguals and how their (and societal) multilinguality works. It will also be of great help to academics conducting research in the field as it clarifies a lot of the imprecision in definitions still present in this fairly new field (in comparison with well-established studies in bilingualism). The book is organized in such a way that it can be used as a basic coursebook for university lectures in multilingualism, offering not only fundamental knowledge as a starting point, but also expanding on it and offering suggestions both for further reading and class activities. I am sure that this aspect will be appreciated by lecturers and students alike.

To conclude this review, I can fully recommend Larissa Aronin's most recent monograph to many different types of reader. These would be academics at different stages of their research and teaching careers, students enrolled in various courses related not only to languages but also to sociology or psychology and, last but not least, multilingual language users themselves, as the publication

will help them make sense of their identity as multilinguals and how multilingualism works for them in different contexts.

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