

Comptes rendus • Reviews

David Crystal. 2003. *English as a global language*, 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 212pp.

Reviewed by Davy Bigot, Université du Québec à Montréal

David Crystal is one of the most well-known authorities on the English language, having authored works such as *The Cambridge encyclopaedia of the English language* (1995), *Language play* (1998) and more recently *Language and the Internet* (2001). In 1997, Crystal published the first edition of another work entitled *English as a global language*. In this book, the author tried to answer the specific question as to why the English language achieved such a global status, by exploring various factors (historical, socioeconomic, political, etc.). Crystal has now come out with a second, slightly revised, edition of this book. Indeed, while the first four chapters mainly present updates, the fifth chapter reveals a number of new additions.

The first chapter constitutes a reflection on the very notion of “global language” in which Crystal introduces several interesting considerations. By various and striking examples (French, Latin, and English in countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, India, Singapore and Vanuatu and over seventy other countries), he emphasizes the fact that a language does not achieve global status without playing a “special role” and that the status of being the “mother-tongue” by itself cannot be the only catalyst. The most important point is that the speakers have to give the language some kind of official role. Then, for several reasons (historical tradition, political expediency and the desire for commercial, cultural or technological contact, etc.), which are examined in some detail by the author, the language may or not achieve the status of a “global language”.

In chapter two, Crystal paints a broad picture of the historical context in which English has spread throughout the world. This historical account very precisely retraces the movement of English around the world (from the pioneering voyages to the Americas, Asia and the Antipodes to our current period). What is particularly striking in this section is that the world-wide spread of English appears to have been established in a very short period of time. Nevertheless, in the first edition of this book, Crystal stated that world-wide, 337 million speakers had learned English as a first language (p. 60) and 235 million speakers had learned it as a second language. In this second edition, the numbers have changed somewhat. The total number of persons who speak English as a first language has now decreased to 329 million (p. 65). This phenomenon is not explained by Crystal himself but by the fact of missing information concerning dialects of certain countries. However, we may think of other reasons (demographic, etc.) which could affect the number of L1 English

speakers around the world. These aspects are not discussed by Crystal and this somewhat weakens an otherwise very detailed analysis.

In the third chapter, Crystal presents the major cultural events that have led English to its current place among the world's languages. All major steps are well exposed (the beginning of the 19th century when Britain became the world's leading industrial and trading nation, the arrival of new sources of energy and new trading systems, etc.) and explain every linguistic consequences (the creation of new terminology for technology and scientific research, etc.). In this section, what is perhaps astonishing to realize is that there has never been any serious competition from any other language of the world. Not a single crisis of linguistic identity ever occurred in the history of the colonial power, and thus there has never been any threat which could have destabilized the growth of English. In fact, no special mention is ever made of English in any of the significant historical documents of Great Britain and the English language has never been formally declared as the official language of that country, nor was it mentioned when the Constitution of the United States was being written. Throughout this period, the story of English was clearly one of rapid expansion and diversification due to innovations resulting in the use of the English language as a primary and even sole means of expression.

In the fourth chapter, the author deals with what he calls "the cultural legacy". Crystal discusses what the English language and its cultural elements have brought to the world-wide society. At the international relations level for instance, the United Nations consists of over 50 distinct organisations, programs and specialized agencies. He explains that many regional and functional commissions, standing committees, expert bodies and other organizations basically function in English even though it is only one of the official languages within all of these structures. With regards to the media, Crystal noted in the first edition that in 1994 about a third of the world's newspapers were published in countries where the English language had a special status and were written in English. In the second edition, we find that this number has increased to 57 per cent in 2002. Many other aspects are also developed in this part (advertising, international communication, education, etc.). All of these represent an important increase in figures found in the first edition for the use of English compared to those given in the second. Again, it would have been relevant to present a variety of explanations for the continued increase in the use of English; however, Crystal does not do so.

In the last chapter, Crystal sets out to review a number of elements concerning the future of English as a global language. This chapter has been considerably modified in the present edition, and contains new information and examples. The author first notices that since the spread of English is related to the important colonial expansion of the British Empire, one could naturally expect strong negative reaction against the language in a number of areas where

it had been imposed. Indeed, people all over the world have a natural wish and tendency to use their own mother-tongue and they often want to see it not only survive but actually grow. Crystal gives us the example of Tanzania where English was jointly official with Swahili until 1967 when the latter became the sole national language. Also, in Malaysia, the National Language Act of 1967 disestablished English as a joint official language, giving sole status to Malay. However, the need for mutual comprehension and the need for identity often pull countries in opposing directions. For instance, in Algeria, French, which was the main foreign language taught at school, was replaced by English in 1996.

However, Crystal argues that the future of English as a world language is possibly more associated with the future of its major users. As he points out, "If anything were to disestablish the military or the economic power of the USA, there would be inevitable consequences for the global status of the language" (p. 128). Indeed, we could expect that the millions of people learning English in order to have access to this power would naturally begin to look at the new economic forces. Therefore, they could quickly adopt new linguistic loyalties by learning the language representing this new power.

The emergence of "New Englishes" is a capital fact for the future of the language. In India, for example, the population has doubled since 1960, and exceeded one billion in 1999, with only approximately 350,000 English mother-tongue speakers but some 200 million using it as a second language, at a variety of competency levels. In fact, there are now almost as many speakers of English in India as there are in England (at the higher estimate, there are six times as many). An inevitable consequence of these developments is that the language becomes open to the winds of linguistic change in totally unpredictable ways, with the formation of new international dialects. What constitutes the greatest interest of this second edition of *English as a global language* is that Crystal describes some specific features (mostly grammatical, lexical and pragmatic characteristics) of these new Englishes.

As he suggests, non-standard varieties are rarely mentioned: "However, we know from intranational dialectology that it is here where grammatical dis-intranational dialects are most likely to be found" (p. 148). New Englishes, which are dialects, are likely to display a similar direction of development as well. David Crystal gives us some examples in a very interesting table on page 153. For instance, different forms of rhetorical questions like "Where young?" (= I'm certainly not young!) or "Where he'll do it?" (= He certainly won't do it!). The SV order can sometimes be changed, as like in "At no stage it was demanded" (instead of "It was demanded at no stage"). We also find such constructions as "You hold on, OK?" which are somewhat impolite in BrE (British English) and AmE (American English), but not considered offensive in CSgE (Chinese Singapore English). With regards to vocabulary,

Crystal also suggests that borrowings from indigenous languages are especially prevalent. In some countries, sensitivity to socio-political pressures, as is evident in contemporary New Zealand, where loans from Maori are increasing. In South Africa, a highly multilingual country where eleven languages have official status, borrowed words are extremely common (the *Dictionary of South African English* provides strong evidence). In such cases, it is inevitable that code-switching develops and results in new mixed varieties. These varieties involving English can be found everywhere. It is now usual to hear about Franglais, Tex-Mex, Chinglish, Japlish, Singlish, Spanglish, Denglish or Angleutsch, and many more.

To conclude this review, we consider that Crystal has offered a very interesting analysis of the spread of English all over the world. Providing updated data, new tables and references and an extra section on the linguistic features of New English varieties, this new edition demonstrates, once again, that the author's reputation is well founded. Dedicated to English, this book should be particularly useful to sociolinguists or other linguists interested in the evolution of the language. With an easy-reading style and fascinating information, this book definitely continues what could be called a *Crystalist* tradition.

References

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Lydia White. 2003. *Second language acquisition and universal grammar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 316pp.

Reviewed by Hossein Nassaji, University of Victoria

This book by Lydia White examines the role of Universal Grammar (UG) in second language acquisition (SLA). Following her earlier book published in 1989, White provides a thorough and up-to-date review and discussion of the various theoretical perspectives on the relationship of UG and SLA as well as research conducted to examine these perspectives.

UG was proposed by Chomsky to account for how children acquire the knowledge of the language so quickly and in such a short period of time. To explain this phenomenon, Chomsky argued that language acquisition is

constrained to a great extent by a set of innately determined linguistic principles. In this context, one of the questions that have attracted a lot of theoretical and empirical attention in recent years is whether L2 acquisition is also constrained by the same principles and parameters of UG and whether L2 learners have access to the same innate ability as L1 learners do. There have been many different proposals as to the nature of this accessibility, ranging from those that claim that L2 learners have no or only partial access to UG to those that hold that UG is fully accessible to L2 learners. While recognizing the differences between the grammar developed by L1 native speakers and L2 learners, White argues that similar principles constrain both the L1 and the L2 grammatical systems.

The book consists of eight chapters. The first chapter discusses the role of UG in L1 acquisition. The question addressed is how L1 learners construct the grammar of their language based on the input they are exposed to. Drawing on what is called “the logical problem of language acquisition” (i.e. the argument that there is a lack of correspondence between the input and the resulting grammar), White argues that without a set of innately determined language-specific universal principles, the acquisition of many abstract properties of grammar is not possible. Other issues discussed in this chapter include parameters of UG, different perspectives on the applicability of UG to L2 acquisition and the methodological problems in discovering the nature of the learner’s linguistic competence.

The rest of the book focuses on the role of UG in L2 acquisition, and explores theories and research regarding the influence of UG on various aspects as well as stages of interlanguage. Chapter 2 begins by examining the logical problem of language acquisition in L2. White argues that, like L1 learners, L2 learners need to construct a grammatical system that can account for the L2 input. L2 learners are also faced with a logical problem of language acquisition; that is, they need to create a highly abstract system based on insufficient input. These conditions, she argues, provide an argument for the hypothesis that UG principles are implicated in the acquisition of L2 grammar. Examples of different syntactic properties, such as those related to the interpretation of subject pronouns, are presented and discussed to demonstrate that L2 learners know more about L2 grammar than they can possibly learn from the input.

Chapter 3 discusses the issue of “the initial state” in L2 acquisition. The question addressed is the extent to which UG principles determine the earliest stages of L2 grammar. Various hypotheses are reviewed, ranging from those that posit that it is the L1 grammar that, wholly or partially, constitutes the initial state of L2 grammar, to those that claim that it is the UG that initiates L2 grammar. Chapter 4 examines the issue of parameter settings in L2. The chapter argues that although there are different hypotheses regarding the nature of UG parameter settings and although there is variability in interlanguage,

research evidence seems to suggest that “interlanguage grammars conform to parameters of UG” (p. 149). Chapter 5 deals with the issue of interlanguage development and change. Language acquisition is a dynamic and developmental process that involves change over time. The question then becomes whether UG provides an account of the changes and transitions between grammars or whether it simply accounts for what the grammar looks like at certain points of time. It is suggested that similar processes triggers developmental changes in both L1 and L2, such as failure to parse the input based on the existing grammar, the structural properties of the input or negative evidence.

Chapter 6 examines the interface between syntax and morphology and the issue of variability in syntactic and morphological domains. Two main perspectives, that is, morphology-before-syntax and syntax-before-morphology, are considered and the relevant research results are examined and compared. The morphology-before-syntax perspective suggests that the acquisition of morphology motivates the acquisition of syntax, and hence it takes variations in morphological features as being indicative of a lack of corresponding abstract syntactic categories. The latter, on the other hand, holds that the acquisition of syntax drives the acquisition of morphology, hence, attributing morphological variability to an under-specification of functional features rather than the absence of functional categories. Rather than to a lack of syntactic representation, White, while distinguishing between morphological variability in L1 and L2 acquisition, concludes that variations at the morphological level in L2 could be due to an under-specification problem and to the difficulty that L2 learners have in linking the acquired underlying abstract morphological and syntactic categories to particular surface syntactic and morphological realizations.

Chapter 7 examines the relationship between lexical semantics and syntax and the way lexical meanings are realized syntactically. Issues discussed include semantic constraints on argument structures and the way syntactic roles map onto syntactic positions in a sentence. Research results are reviewed to show how UG principles constrain these properties in L2. Finally, the last chapter addresses the issue of ultimate attainment in L2, and the extent to which the ultimate grammars developed by L2 learners are similar to the ones developed by L1 learners. The chapter concludes that although L2 acquisition is constrained by UG principles, L1 seems to play an influential role in determining the final state of L2 grammar.

A good feature of White’s book is the analysis of theoretical perspectives in light of recent research evidence. This research-based examination of the issues also allows the reader to better evaluate the possible relationship between UG and L2 acquisition and the various dimensions of this hypothesis. Another helpful feature of the book is that each chapter includes a concluding section that highlights the main ideas presented in the chapter, and also a series of

discussion questions and suggestions for further reading. There is also a glossary at the end that provides definitions for most of the terminologies and key concepts discussed in the book.

Although the author points out that the book is not intended for beginners, and that it presupposes some prior knowledge of linguistics, particularly familiarity with current linguistic theories such as Government and Binding, and Minimalism, the book is very well laid out, and the key concepts are well presented and illustrated. Perhaps one issue that could have been discussed in greater detail is the impact of age on the properties of UG and, in particular, on the relationship of UG and the initial states of L2 acquisition. Age effects are discussed in the book, but the discussion is mainly limited to the last chapter and with reference to the final state of L2 grammar. Does age also affect the initial stages of L2 grammar? Is it possible that adults show a more L1-based than a UG-based initial state than children do? Also, the logical problem of language acquisition or “the poverty of stimulus” argument presented at the beginning of the book has been challenged by those who argue that L1 learners have access to much richer input and can make much more of it than the innatists assume (see Cowie, 1999, for a recent re-appraisal). A discussion of these arguments in chapter one could have been helpful in providing a context for evaluating the fundamental premises that underlie a UG-based approach to language acquisition. Finally, although the book is about L2 acquisition, as the author also points out, UG is not an acquisition theory; it is a linguistic theory that has been primarily concerned with an explanation of the learner’s grammatical competence. Therefore, the theory may not, and should not be expected to, account for the many psychological, social, and affective factors that influence language acquisition.

In conclusion, I believe that this book is a significant contribution to the field of SLA. It provides a comprehensive and up-to-date review and analysis of UG theory and research in L2 acquisition. Thus, the book provides a valuable text for both graduate and undergraduate courses that examine SLA from a linguistics perspective.

References

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James Collins and Richard K. Blot. 2003. *Literacy and literacies: Texts, power and identity*. New York, Cambridge University Press. xx + 217p.

Compte rendu de Micheline Ouellet, University of Calgary

Le titre de ce volume, comme il est mentionné dans l'avant-propos, éclaire beaucoup le lecteur sur les intentions des auteurs. L'utilisation du pluriel pour le deuxième terme, *littératies*, réfère au changement d'approches dans les années 80 où les "New Literacy Studies" (NLS) ont emprunté le passage d'une littératie, vue comme un système d'habiletés autonomes (p. xi), vers la reconnaissance de plusieurs littératies. En effet, des études assez nombreuses et bien documentées illustrent comment les pratiques en littératie varient d'un contexte culturel et historique à un autre. Cette nouvelle tendance a constitué, avec des auteurs comme Heath (1983), Street (1984), Gee (1991), Collins (1995) et Barton et Hamilton (1998), un riche répertoire de travaux permettant de découvrir la signification sociale et culturelle sous-jacente aux textes, aux inscriptions et récits. Ainsi, cette approche résolument ethnographique de la littératie/littératies marque une opposition au modèle traditionnel, universel, autonome. C'est alors que le livre de Collins et Blot intervient et développe l'idée de la nécessité pressante de réviser les approches ci-haut mentionnées : l'approche traditionnelle ou universaliste qui met l'accent sur un modèle autonome de la littératie, où l'oral et l'écrit sont traités comme des entités isolées doit être remplacée par une approche nouvelle ou relativiste qui privilégie des modèles *situés* ou socioculturels des littératies, où il existe une interrelation entre l'oral et l'écrit. Ces dernières approches ont donné lieu à des méthodes pédagogiques variées. Les auteurs démarrent cette révision en présentant et en critiquant des textes d'autorité et des études de cas sous un angle anthropologique et philosophique. Ce faisant, ils soulignent l'interrogation actuelle soulevée par les décideurs politiques et les institutions scolaires, à savoir : devrait-on priver les enfants des groupes minoritaires d'étudier leur propre littératie au profit du courant général de la littératie dominante — savoir lire, écrire et communiquer selon un modèle universel — qui répondrait aux besoins économiques des sociétés modernes et postmodernes ? Comment devons-nous interpréter la littératie dans les assises profondes d'une éducation formelle ? Quelle est la relation entre l'acquisition de la littératie à l'école et les usages de la littératie dans la vie de tous les jours, c'est-à-dire en dehors de l'école (Shultz et Hull, 2002) ?

L'apport des auteurs à ces débats est de proclamer l'obligation de briser l'impasse dichotomique de l'oral/écrit en introduisant les trois concepts directeurs non-dichotomiques, *textes* (représentations), *pouvoir* (autorité) et *identité* (allégeance), pour en arriver à une compréhension sous un éclairage différent de la littératie/des littératies. Ils suggèrent donc, sans perdre la spécificité de ce que les récentes études de type ethnologique (NLS) ont apporté, un

cadre théorique plus général, qui tout en acceptant l'apport historique et ethnographique comme étant nécessaire à la compréhension, le considère insuffisant à l'heure actuelle. Leurs trois concepts directeurs, présentés en sous-titre, servent d'assise au plan suivi tout au long du livre. Dans leur introduction, les auteurs prennent soin de situer le lecteur face à leur approche, qui conserve un aspect anthropologique et historique essentiel. Ils exposent leur plan structuré, détaillant l'intention de chacun des sept chapitres. D'entrée de jeu, les auteurs fournissent des données sur les origines de la littératie pour ensuite se pencher sur les questions controversées de la rationalité et du développement social et cognitif. Après avoir répondu à la question : « qu'est-ce qu'un texte ? », les auteurs traitent de la question du pouvoir pour aborder par la suite celle de l'identité, et cela, en passant par des études de cas plus pointues qu'ils critiquent et analysent en profondeur. Par exemple, les leçons euro-américaines au chapitre 4 ; la littératie et la formation de l'identité dans une Amérique moderne et postmoderne au chapitre 5 ; les legs coloniaux en Mésoamérique, dans les Andes et dans l'île d'Hispaniola, de même que les transformations post-coloniales indigènes en Amérique du Nord, en Amérique du Sud et dans les Caraïbes au chapitre 6.

Ces études de cas démontrent comment les usages de la littératie/des littératies sont impliqués dans la construction du pouvoir social, dans le développement des états modernes et dans l'émergence de l'éducation universelle. De plus, ces études permettent l'analyse de la relation entre la littératie et l'identité dans le but d'explorer les caractères problématiques du soi et de l'inscription, les dynamiques de la classe, du genre et de la race dans l'aspect social des deux Amériques modernes et postmodernes (chapitre 5).

Les auteurs poursuivent leur réflexion en évoquant, au passage, que les usages de la littératie, de la religion et des différentes formes de promesses salvatrices en contexte autre que celui de l'Occident ont contribué à créer une zone de conflit entre l'identité, l'autorité, la vision de soi et du futur. Il y a donc eu conflit entre la dynamique identitaire et les pratiques de la littératie coloniale et postcoloniale. En effet, les auteurs, par de nombreux exemples, démontrent que la littératie n'est pas une notion abstraite et neutre : les pratiques de lecture et d'écriture sont profondément modelées par les identités nouvelles ou hybrides et la résistance au pouvoir (p. 123).

La clé ou l'outil principal nécessaire pour saisir l'originalité de la contribution des deux auteurs aux débats actuels en littératie sera l'attention que le lecteur portera aux trois concepts directeurs déjà mentionnés. Ceux-ci recouvriront tout au long de l'ouvrage les multiples littératies répertoriées par Steiner (1997) — littératie scolaire, littératie vernaculaire, littératie culturelle, littératie électronique, littératie morale, littératie émotionnelle (p. 1) — et permettront d'identifier les limites du modèle autonome ; mais surtout conduiront à un modèle de littératies conçues comme des pratiques communicatives

inséparables des valeurs, du sens de soi et des formes de régulation et de pouvoir. Il va sans dire que cet ouvrage, dont le but est de participer aux débats actuels dans le grand domaine des études en littératie, n'est que trop pertinent et utile aux différents intéressés par le sujet, quelle que soit leur appartenance — linguiste, anthropologue, ethnologue, sociolinguiste, psycholinguiste, linguiste ethno-historique — ou tout simplement toute personne intéressée au domaine de l'éducation.

De surcroît, par analogie avec le contraste établi entre la vision globale, universelle et décontextualisée de la littératie et les avancées de la conception pluraliste des différentes pratiques des littératies, ce livre offre davantage une série de petites synthèses qu'une grande synthèse. C'est pourquoi, vu sous cet angle, le présent compte rendu expose succinctement notre perception des trois concepts directeurs de cet ouvrage qui concourent séparément ou ensemble à démontrer que la littératie, encore une fois, n'est pas une notion neutre et abstraite mais contient des éléments culturels, des pouvoirs de développement tant individuel que social et façonne l'identité.

L'approche des auteurs consiste à se demander en premier lieu : qu'est-ce qu'un texte dans le contexte actuel des nouveaux modes de communication et de représentation digitale ? En soulevant cette interrogation, ils ouvrent une nouvelle voie aux études en littératie, à l'instar de la nouvelle vague des années quatre-vingts. Par exemple, un texte est soit un document écrit soit toute autre forme d'expression ayant une signification inséparable des contextes dans lesquels il est produit ou utilisé. Il est donc associé à une intention de pouvoir, comme les travaux des post-structuralistes ou ceux de la théorie-pratique l'ont déjà démontré dans les traditions intellectuelles aussi bien que dans la vie de tous les jours. Ce pouvoir n'étant pas défini par la seule conception d'une autorité qui impose à des individus ou des groupes sa volonté, mais plutôt comme une réalité de dimensions microscopiques, une réalité intime qui constitue et régularise. Ainsi, ce pouvoir subtil établit la conscience de soi et définit une identité tant individuelle que sociale dans un temps et un espace donnés.

Cet aspect du pouvoir est traité en ajoutant à l'approche des NLS — toujours insatisfaisante selon eux — la perspective plus intellectuelle de penseurs français comme Jacques Derrida, Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault et Pierre Bourdieu. Cette dernière perspective, contrairement à ce qui prévalait aux États-Unis dans les années quatre-vingt-dix et qu'on a appelé la tendance « Reading Wars » consistant à imposer une façon uniforme et universelle d'enseigner l'écrit et l'oral à tous, cette dernière perspective, disons-nous, élève le débat au sujet de la littératie au-delà des préoccupations éducationnelles anglophones vers des considérations idéologiques, plus largement philosophiques et théoriques. En effet, l'influence de ces penseurs de langue française est de poids dans l'arène intellectuelle américaine. Appuyons cette assertion par ce qu'écrivait

récemment François Cusset (2004, p. 46), à savoir que « Jacques Derrida est le penseur français qui a eu le plus d'impact sur le champ intellectuel américain. Un succès qui s'explique par la convergence entre la déconstruction derridienne et une tradition de la "critique paradoxale" aux États-Unis. » En définitive, la pensée de Collins et Blot fait signe vers un autre cap : nous n'assistons pas nécessairement au déclin de la perspective socioculturelle de la littératie comme *littératies* mais plutôt à l'émergence d'une littératie comme *technologie* (p. 169). Les auteurs se réfèrent à la littératie comme *technologie de l'intellect* — expression de Jack Goody — qui relancera très certainement le débat sur la nature du texte, la pratique du pouvoir et les dynamiques de l'identité ; ces trois concepts directeurs influencés par la nature plurielle de la littératie (p. 173), voire les littératies, demeurent une provocation et une invitation aux interprétations multiples (p. 176).

À juste titre, l'analyse de Collins et Blot se situe, à notre avis, dans le courant de la philosophie de la déconstruction américaine infusée par Jacques Derrida. Mûs par ce courant postmoderne, les auteurs analysent en détail, par le biais des études de cas précisément choisies dans le contexte américain, les effets ou conséquences de cette vision prédominante de la littératie comme outil de colonisation. Citons en exemple le cas du programme de revitalisation des Indiens Tolowa au nord de la Californie. Le concept de pouvoir s'articule autour d'une dialectique complexe entre les pratiques textuelles, les subjectivités politiques et les dynamiques économiques. C'est pourquoi les auteurs prétendent que les identités hybrides ne sont pas seulement un amalgame des manières de faire des indigènes avec celles du colonisateur mais sont une *nouvelle* identité résultant du fruit d'un combat constant avec et contre le pouvoir impérial (p. 122). Ainsi, la littératie n'est ni une cause, ni une conséquence aux identités hybrides ; c'est elle qui les façonne.

Dans ces questions controversées de pouvoir et d'identité, les auteurs ne perdent jamais de vue l'approche anthropologique qu'ils ont annoncée en introduction : ils situent le débat dans une large perspective qui va de l'Ancien Sumer à l'ère des technologies de l'information. Ne rejetant aucunement ce que les études antérieures ont apporté, ils essaient, par de courtes synthèses, d'enrichir et d'orienter le débat vers des pistes d'analyse postmoderne en servant des concepts trilogiques *textes*, *pouvoir* et *identité*, inhérents au tandem littératie/littératies. De cette manière, ils innovent et créent un nouveau terrain fertile au débat.

Cet ouvrage contribue fortement à stimuler la recherche en littératie. Par leurs critiques nuancées et par leurs analyses perspicaces, ces auteurs ont réalisé une oeuvre de haute qualité que nous recommandons spécialement à tous les intéressés au domaine de la littératie. Nous ne pouvons résister ici à la tentation de le suggérer comme livre de référence important à tout étudiant qui désire s'initier aux connaissances accumulées et récentes en littératie. Comme

nous l'avons déjà mentionné, nous y retrouvons un ensemble de propos variés appartenant à différentes écoles de pensée. Les auteurs cités, de même que les documents évoqués, entraînent le lecteur à l'intérieur d'un débat tout à fait semblable à celui qu'on retrouve dans un séminaire au niveau des études supérieures. La dialectique des auteurs suscite la réflexion et garde toujours le débat ouvert. Il s'agit donc d'un outil précieux pour les études et la recherche en littératie.

Ajoutons, pour rendre justice au livre et aux deux auteurs, que l'angle sous lequel ils envisagent les études en littératie ne constitue pas en soi une grille d'analyse imposée et réductrice des trois concepts directeurs *textes*, *pouvoir* et *identité* qui, par analogie, sont les trois facettes d'un prisme triangulaire par lequel passe la compréhension de la littératie chez eux. Cette analyse de Collins et Blot constitue plutôt un regard critique appartenant à une analyse de haut calibre à partir de perspectives historiques, anthropologiques, philosophiques et épistémologiques.

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Heather McKay and Abigail Tom. 1999. *Teaching adult second language learners*. In the series *Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 234pp.

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Heather McKay and Abigail Tom present us with a practical book for teaching a second language to adults. The goal of this book is twofold: (a) to give teachers some background knowledge on how to teach adults, and (b) to give them ideas of activities that can be done with adults in a second language class. The book is divided into three sections: the first section features general information about teaching a second language to adults, the second section focuses on the building of a community in the classroom, and the last section presents teachers with an assortment of activities created around nine different themes. Though the activities are meant to teach English as a second or foreign language, they can very easily be adapted to teach any other second or foreign language.

The information contained in the first part of the book is very general and limited in scope. Within the span of 23 pages, the authors give pedagogical information about the adult language class which can prove useful for new teachers. For example, the adult second language learner is described as an immigrant who has come to a new country for a variety of reasons, and this learner has a first language, background knowledge, expectations, a particular learning style, a degree of confidence and motivation as well as personal circumstances, all of which should be considered by the language teacher. The authors also explain how to discover the learners' needs as well as how to plan a course and put together a balanced lesson. The information provided is clear, and questionnaires and charts are provided to help the novice teacher organise and plan his/her first course. As well, the authors suggest further readings and provide several references.

The next part of the book proposes a number of ideas towards the establishment of a community within the language class. The teacher is encouraged to organise the classroom and the activities in order to give a feeling of belonging to the students. For example, several classroom routines are suggested as a way to give predictability to the class and make students feel more comfortable. Pair and group work are discussed and the authors recommend several techniques for forming groups. Lastly, the authors suggest activities to help students get acquainted, and they explain how these will help the students become members of the group.

The third part of this book, which I believe to be its core, contains a great number of ideas and activities to help teach an interesting and organised adult language class. The activities are grouped together under nine themes which are commonly used with adult learners: personal identification, family,

community, food, clothing, housing, health, work and money. For each activity, the authors suggest the duration and the difficulty level of the activity. Most activities are aimed at beginner and intermediate students, but variations for some of the activities are given for students in advanced levels. The language goals (e.g. ask and answer questions, share cultural information related to meals) are presented for each activity. The reader will also be able to find information related to group organization, preparation needed for the activities, and procedures to be followed. Some interesting features are follow-up activities as well suggestions on how to vary some of the activities. Unfortunately, the activities themselves are not categorized other than by themes and those sub-categorized under each theme are not contextualised nor have they any link among themselves. It would have been interesting to know how the authors classified the activities (e.g. communicative, experiential) or how they viewed the teaching of vocabulary or grammar. The activities are not organised in any form of progression. The book is basically a recipe book of activities.

In conclusion, *Teaching adult second language learners* does achieve its twofold goal by offering information on how to set up a language class for adult learners and a lot of ideas for language activities. This book should be of particular interest to teachers who are faced with their first adult language class and who need knowledge about these learners' particular characteristics as well as practical advice on how to deal with them.
