

Book Reviews/Comptes Rendus

Raymond LeBlanc, Jean Compain, Lise Duquette, Hubert Séguin (eds). *L'Enseignement des langues secondes aux adultes: recherches et pratiques*. Ottawa: Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1989. pp. 245, Price \$24.95. Reviewed by M.E. Peggy Watts, Director, Division of Language Learning, Faculty of Part-Time and Continuing Education, The University of Western Ontario.

In recent decades, as French language instruction has gained prominence in schools across Canada, a considerable body of literature and pedagogical material on the teaching of languages to children and adolescents has been published by Canadian academics, teachers and writers. Adults too have shown increasing interest in learning a second language, and courses for them abound, but considerably less research has focussed on the adult language learner, and very little classroom material intended for teaching adults has been published. This book, a collection of papers from the first biennial colloquium of the University of Ottawa's Second Language Institute, held in May 1987, is a useful new resource for adult language teaching in the Canadian context. The Second Language Institute (SLI) is one of the few post-secondary units (excluding academic departments) in the country to maintain a very active teaching program as well as a strong research profile. This collection is indicative of the high calibre of work being carried on there in both areas.

The book contains thirteen articles – six plenary addresses and seven “workshop” papers – all revised by the authors (but not by the editors) after the conference. Raymond LeBlanc's introduction points to some of the problems familiar to adult learners, their teachers and program administrators: the bewildering variety of courses and standards, the scarcity of teaching materials designed specifically for adult classes, the lack of formal training programs for teachers of adults, and the rarity of professional literature pertinent to the Canadian situation. He also provides a brief résumé of each article, useful in the absence of an index for those looking for specific information.

The six plenary session papers which appear in the first half of the volume were requested, as LeBlanc points out in his introduction, to highlight “à la fois certains des problèmes auxquels se trouve confronté le domaine de l'enseignement des langues secondes aux adultes et des réalisations intéressantes, à l'Institut des langues secondes et ailleurs, face à ces difficultés” (p. 4). The first, by British language teaching specialist William Littlewood, is a thoughtful examination of what communication in language teaching has come to mean in recent years.

Reflecting the emphasis in some of the SLI's courses on the receptive language skills, Lise Duquette's paper demonstrates how selected theories and models in

cognitive psychology have led to an enhanced understanding of the learner's comprehension of the second language. This article is of particular interest in that many language programs still stress production skills, to the neglect of the equally important skills of reading and listening; teachers may therefore be unfamiliar with the important research presented here.

Mariette Migneron's article describes successful experiments at the SLI with a type of course whose point of departure is the development of receptive skills. Designed as a kind of university-level immersion program, the "sheltered course" provides an opportunity for second-language students to study a subject such as psychology in a class taught in the second language; a language teacher conducts supplementary sessions where students participate in communicative activities related to the course content. This experiment should command the attention of anglophone universities which may find themselves called upon to offer French-language courses in a variety of academic subjects for students who are not yet fluent.

Raymond LeBlanc addresses the relatively new area of evaluation in the communicative context, referring to three different instruments developed and implemented at SLI, two of them to measure language competence for the University of Ottawa's language requirements, and the other a questionnaire used to determine the placement of adult students in homogeneous second language classes. The latter is a significant innovation whose effectiveness, easy administration and low cost make it ideal for continuing education units with large adult language programs.

For those interested in the integration of computer-assisted learning into language programs, Diane Huot-Tremblay gives a critical overview of developments before and after 1970. To the vexing problem of how to conceive computer-assisted learning programs which will effectively support communicative teaching, she proposes that artificial intelligence provides a potentially fruitful avenue for further research.

In the final plenary paper, Pierre Calvé tackles the question of the training of language teachers, which he calls "l'un des aspects les plus négligés de notre discipline" (p. 91). He examines the need to integrate teacher training with subject-matter training, advocates the establishment of second language teaching as a distinct discipline, and exposes what he calls the three false premises on which the system of teacher training (in Ontario) is based. This is a provocative article supplying ample food for thought at a time when the demand for knowledgeable, skilled French teachers is growing dramatically in schools and adult education settings.

The seven "workshop" papers address a variety of subjects of interest to future and practising language teachers. Robert Courchène deals with the learning process itself via a critical look at Stephen Krashen's distinction between learning and acquisition. He takes specific exception with Krashen's insistence that the two are separate processes, and with his incomplete treatment of the roles of comprehensible input and learned information (rules). Courchène also finds fault

with Krashen's vague definitions, and challenges his contention that adults can acquire a second language as children acquire their first. Teachers who have questioned the recent tendency to treat formal grammar teaching with fear and loathing (a tendency to which Krashen has contributed no small encouragement) will appreciate Courchêne's efforts to situate grammar solidly within the communicative language program.

Two other articles deal specifically with the teaching of grammar. Hubert Séguin's "La Grammaire explicite dans un cours de FLS: par quel bout commencer?" proposes a novel way of organizing a grammar component for a basic communicative language program for adult beginners. Séguin's point of departure is his recognition – no doubt shared by many teachers of adults – that some adult learners feel frustrated by a purely communicative approach in which grammar is to be inferred rather than learned in a systematic way. In a somewhat abstruse article, Jacques Fleury explains how novels can be used to help students at the advanced level to infer complex grammatical concepts, in this instance verb tense usage.

Marie-Claude Tréville approaches another practical teaching problem in her article entitled "Faut-il enseigner le vocabulaire de la langue seconde?" After looking at how various language teaching methods have treated the teaching of vocabulary, she asserts that vocabulary can be taught, and then discusses how the teacher can help students determine meaning and retain new words.

Two contributors focus on the written forms of the language. Claudette Marie Cornaire recounts her experience in applying a formula for measuring the readability of French newspaper and magazine articles for second language students. Jean Compain describes the positive results he has obtained in an advanced writing course at the University of Ottawa with the three workbooks in Vigner's *La Machine à écriture* series.

One article stands apart as more research-centered than the others. Johanne Bourdages and Cécile Champagne report on a study designed to test the validity of two previous studies on the utility of phonetics training as a means of making teachers better judges of students' pronunciation. This is the most technical of the contributions, and will only be fully appreciated by readers with a background in statistics.

Despite the absence of editorial intervention, the book is laudably coherent. The articles are largely uniform in style and organization. Each contains a very clear statement of objectives and approach, and most are divided into subtitled sections and written in lucid prose. Variations in style such as LeBlanc's use of "étudiants et étudiantes" where other authors use the masculine form, and some disparity in referring to sources (such as Bourdages and Champagne's use of *op. cit* where others use the date of the work in question) are minor.

The collection appears to have been organized with the non-specialist reader in mind. The six plenary session papers are presented first, and lay down some of the basic issues and provide background for the remaining articles. Littlewood's paper on communication, for example, provides an excellent overall introduction, since

the rest of the articles presuppose that teaching is taking place in a communicative context. Duquette's article explains cognitive psychology's contribution to an understanding of language learning, preparing the reader for references in subsequent articles to schema theory, the roles of long-term and short-term memory and structuro-behaviourist approaches. The echos of reference and terminology from one paper to another give the work a unity not always found in collections of this nature.

Its breadth and clarity make this book an important purchase for libraries and teaching units which serve adults. The topics embrace significant but sometimes less-than-well-aired issues for teachers and administrators, as well as generally down-to-earth suggestions for the practitioner on questions dealing with all skill areas. All but the introductory Littlewood paper are accompanied by useful bibliographies. Some knowledge of current language teaching theories and methods is supposed by the writers of the seven "workshop" presentations (for example, Courchène assumes that the reader is familiar with Krashen's idea of "monitor use", p. 117). However, technical terms are almost always defined, so that the book would be easily accessible to student teachers and teachers lacking formal theoretical training (who constitute a significant presence on the adult teaching scene, as LeBlanc notes in his introduction, p. 3). It is not recommended only for teachers of French, since the authors often refer to the teaching of English as well, and much of the content would be helpful for teachers of other languages to adults.

This collection of papers fulfills the promise of its title by successfully demonstrating how research can have a positive impact on effective teaching practice. All of the suggested implications for program design or for the classroom are shown to be based on examination of theoretical and methodological sources evolved from research and inquiry. Even teachers who tend to dismiss theory and methodology as irrelevant or too abstract should find in these highly readable papers convincing evidence that such knowledge can help one understand why certain approaches and activities work and provide inspiration for the creation of new ones.

Teachers should also find refreshing the healthy skepticism which this book demonstrates toward some of the "sacred cows" of the language teaching field. These papers make no suggestion that particular writers or methods are to be followed unquestioningly, or that anyone has yet discovered the perfect way to teach or learn a second language. In the spirit of honest critical inquiry, the authors present sensible, pertinent research and evidence of ideas that work for them, making it very clear that these are but some of the pieces in the largely unsolved puzzle of how languages are learned and can be taught.