

## Book Review

Denham, Kristin & Anne Lobeck (eds). 2010.  
*Linguistics at School: Language Awareness in Primary and Secondary Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.\*

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*Linguistics at School* is an edited collection of chapters presented in three parts. The first two parts examine linguistics at school from an institutional, or top-down, perspective; and a classroom-based, or bottom-up, perspective, respectively. The third part features vignettes from classroom teachers, providing a view from non-linguists grappling with the use of linguistics in the classroom. References are provided at the end of the book (282-302), along with an index (303-311).

In his foreword (xiii-xv), Ray Jackendoff stresses that classroom teachers have little to no training in linguistics, and calls for a change, a call we see echoed in many of the chapters in this volume. Kristin Denham and Anne Lobeck address this and other roadblocks between linguistic research and teaching practice, namely linguistics' relegation to the academy in their Introduction (1-6). They suggest that the book's target audience is primarily linguists, but also teachers and teacher educators. Shared themes among the chapters in this volume include linguistics as a valuable and viable topic in K-12 education, that linguists and teachers must work together, and that the call to action is to the linguists to initiate this type of collaborative effort.

Part I: Linguistics from the top down: encouraging institutional change (7-121) begins with an introduction from Denham and Lobeck (9-12), in which they inform the reader that Part I is mostly top-down background on linguistics and education, and in which they provide an outline of chapters in this part. In Chapter 1, "Ideologies of language, art, and science" (13-23), Edwin Battistella provides two goals: to explore past problems and misconceptions between linguistic theory and teaching practice, and to compare linguistic misperceptions with those of biology and art. He

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places the prescriptive/descriptive grammatical misunderstandings of linguistics alongside the teaching of evolution (“Linguists should emphasize that the best curriculum is one that is current and accepted in the research community and that relies on expert standards of evidence and inference rather than unsupported opinions and the influence of pressure groups.” [18-19]). Battistella goes on to compare linguists and artists as “irrelevant experts” (21). His main points are that linguists should listen to a variety of perspectives, be involved in curricular planning and teacher training, build on current teaching practice, and garner support for K-12 linguistics instruction to better inform teachers. His final point is that linguists have to be persuasive of the value of linguistics, and break down barriers of dialect prejudice and non-expert opinion.

In Chapter 2, “Bringing linguistics into the school curriculum: not one less” (24-34), Wayne O’Neil discusses his lifelong focus of “introducing *formal* linguistics into the English-language curriculum” toward the development of students’ critical inquiry skills (25). He details his experiences at Project English at the University of Oregon in the 1960s, at the Educational Technology Center at Harvard in the 1980s, and his recent work in Seattle, Washington with 5<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher David Pippin. O’Neil describes linguistics as a “hard sell” (33) in the classroom because it is neither a concrete nor abstract field. It works when the desire for collaboration stems from the teachers, rather than the linguists (33-34); however, linguists must proceed by fostering relationships with K-12 teachers wherever and however possible.

Chapters 3-5 widen the perspective by offering insights into initiatives in England, Scotland, and Australia. In Chapter 3, “How linguistics has influenced schools in England” (35-48), Richard Hudson focuses on education changes in England as a result of influences from linguistics, particularly with respect to the English language A-levels. The A-level English language (ALEL) has increased the popularity of language study, and has come about from the involvement of linguists in curricular planning. One ongoing problem, however, is the lack of linguistic training of the teachers administering the program. Hudson, like other authors, maintains that “linguistics can be taught successfully at school” (48), but reminds the reader that curricular and policy change is slow, that linguists must collaborate with educators, that a small number of influential people can be effective, and that it is worthwhile to push through difficulties regarding teacher training.

In Chapter 4, “Supporting the teaching of knowledge about language in Scottish schools” (49-61), Graeme Trousdale explains and calls for

support of Knowledge about Language (KAL) curricula in Scotland. The KAL curriculum examines the linguistic diversity of Scotland (both teacher and students are involved in the learning), and can be used in English and foreign language classrooms. Again, the author makes the call for collaboration between linguists and educators, but mentions the incentives of professional development units for teachers as well as resources available online.

Chapter 5, “Envisioning linguistics in secondary education: an Australian exemplar” (62-75) features Jean Mulder’s discussion of what happens when linguists and teachers get together. In an effort to fill a gap left by the loss of explicit grammar instruction, this Australian curriculum offers tools and metalanguage to students as well as authentic text in order to get them to think about language use. The result is that the subject of English language study seems to be increasing in popularity. Mulder also offers advice for those considering writing textbooks for senior secondary English language students, including that linguists are good with the framework and teachers are good with implementation.

In Chapter 6, “Linguistics and educational standards: the California experience” (76-90), Carol Lord and Sharon Klein contend, “[i]f we agree that awareness and knowledge of language is important for citizens, and crucially important for leaders and policy makers, then it is reasonable that it should be part of the general school curriculum.” (76-77). They provide an overview of history of education standards in the US, including the changing needs of students and teaching to the test, using California as a case study. Like many other authors in this volume, Lord and Klein believe that linguists should be involved in teacher training, but that this effort gets thwarted by the push for teaching to tests rather than standards. The authors suggest a number of ways in which linguists can be involved in education, and close by suggesting that Americans try to follow the British and Australian examples (see above).

Jeffrey Reaser also advocates working with a standards-based curriculum in Chapter 7, “Developing sociolinguistic curricula that help teachers meet standards” (91-105). According to Reaser, it is not solely the fault of the linguists that sociolinguistics/language diversity has not been part of the K-12 curriculum; the classroom has been so reliant on prescriptive grammar that it’s really difficult to do anything else. Teaching to the test isn’t helping any either, but can be avoided by situating linguistics curricula in social studies (an area that doesn’t appear on standardized tests, giving teachers more freedom). Comparing a sociolinguistically-informed K-12 curriculum with adoption of a heliocentric model, Reaser refers to Sweetland’s (2006) study on the effects of teaching literature-

based dialect on elementary students' performance on standardized tests: the students showed improvement. Teachers can point to these studies to justify to their administrators teaching linguistic diversity in the classroom. This chapter also gives some linguistically-minded and standards-based unit ideas based on PBS' *Do You Speak American?* (social studies and English) and the *Voices of North Carolina* (social studies) curriculum.

In the final chapter in Part I, Chapter 8, "Linguistic development in children's writing: changing classroom pedagogies" (106-121), Debra Myhill provides a specific focus on linguistic development of writing. "[T]he place of linguistics in the writing instruction classroom is twofold: firstly, to provide learners with the metalinguistic understanding to enable them to become confident crafters and designers of written texts; and secondly, to provide teachers with an understanding of how to assess children's development in writing and their instructional needs." (108). Myhill characterizes studies that say that grammar instruction has no effect on students' writing as misguided—they do not account for studies like Fogel and Ehri (2001), which develop students' grammar skills in academic English based on their use of other dialect features in their writing. After assessing the sophistication of writing at different ages and abilities, Myhill concludes that teachers need to be aware of and communicate linguistic strategies that will improve student writing.

Part II: Linguistics from the bottom up: encouraging classroom change (123-226) begins with another introduction by Denham and Lobeck (125-128), who explain that these chapters are about bottom-up partnerships involving linguists and teachers collaborating at K-12 schools. The main themes here are that linguists need to put themselves in the position of learner in order to connect theory and practice, and that these collaborations benefit linguistics as well as K-12 education.

The first contribution to Part II is Chapter 9, "From cold shoulder to funded welcome: lessons from the trenches of dialectically diverse classrooms" (129-148). In this chapter, Rebecca S. Wheeler describes her journey, which began in 2000 when she found a number of African-American English features in student writing. When she presented her data to local principals, she got the cold shoulder. By 2007, things had changed for her, and her projects were not only welcomed, but funded. Wheeler shares her insights on how to avoid some of the pitfalls she experienced while bringing linguistics into the schools. She warns that linguists have to be prepared for the obstacles they will face, but that working with linguistically-minded strategies really does help close the achievement gap, which is worth all the trouble.

In Chapter 10, “Positioning linguists as learners in K-12 schools” (149-160), Long Peng and Jean Ann describe their experience building up a linguistically-informed professional development program in New York’s public schools. They explain the importance of not assuming they knew more than the teachers, who, while linguistically naïve, do have ideas about language that they need to share and discuss. What teachers really want are ideas they can implement immediately, but that won’t get them into trouble when it comes to focusing on measures of accountability such as high-stakes testing. The chapter reveals that getting data from student work to inform teaching is one way to achieve research-based/data-driven instruction

In Chapter 11, “Fostering teacher change: effective professional development for sociolinguistic diversity” (161-174), Julie Sweetland discusses teachers’ beliefs about language, and how they need to be addressed to effect sociolinguistic awareness and attention in the classroom. Luckily, she says, this change in attitude can be effected by teaching a sociolinguistically sound model. Again, the author stresses that professional development should involve information teachers can use immediately, preferably through whatever they’re already teaching (literature, etc.). Sweetland encourages linguists to “treat negative attitudes as a baseline, not a barrier” (165), and explains that teachers were willing to learn, especially about dealing with linguistic prejudice. According to Sweetland, “... the most important factor in influencing teachers’ attitudes about sociolinguistic diversity is the opportunity to teach about it.” (169).

Chapter 12, “On promoting linguistics literacy: bringing language science to the English classroom” (175-188) features the collaborative efforts of Maya Honda, Wayne O’Neil, and David Pippin as they teach linguistics literacy as a way to enable cross-curricular inquiry with English and science and to foster collaborative research and presentation skills in the schools. Examples from 5<sup>th</sup> grade morphophonology lessons are provided. Kristin Denham’s Chapter 13, “Linguistics in a primary school” (189-203) is similar in that it encourages linguists to establish which aspects of linguistics are most relevant to teachers, and then focus on those. Linguistics’ benefit to primary schools is its cross-curricular, critical-thinking application, and teaching morphology problems relates languages of the world to social studies units and other activities. She calls for further dissemination of lesson plans, for justifications for studying linguistics in the classroom, and for required linguistics training for all teachers (200-202).

In Chapter 14, “Educating linguists: how partner teaching enriches linguistics” (204-212), Anne Lobeck discusses effective ways in which linguists can learn to get out of the ivory tower and work in schools, from the oft-stated teacher education courses in linguistics to instituting World Language Clubs in the schools. Perhaps most important is linguists’ need for a methods/materials component to effectively inform teachers about linguistics for their classrooms.

Chapter 15, “The Linguistic Olympiads: academic competitions in linguistics for secondary school students” (213-226) is an interesting addition to this volume in that its topic is an extra-curricular activity centered around the study of linguistics. Ivan Derzhanski and Thomas Payne elaborate the history, present, and future of Linguistic Olympiads in their significance to linguistics, mathematics, discovery, and analysis.

Part III: Vignettes: voices from the classroom (227-281) features contributions from classroom teachers involved in using linguistics in the K-12 classroom. In the introduction to this part (229-233), Denham and Lobeck insist that “...much of what teachers already do is linguistically informed” (231), and that linguists are simply building on what the teachers know and do.

As she explains in Chapter 16, “And you can all say *haboo*: enriching the standard language arts curriculum with linguistic analysis”, Angela Roh teaches items relevant to class units, i.e. Native American borrowings and oral storytelling for a unit on early American literature, and linguistic prejudice/register/AAVE for a unit on author Langston Hughes.

In Chapter 17, “Code switching: connecting written and spoken language patterns” (240-243), Karren Mayer and Kirstin New discuss how they used Wheeler and Swords’ Codeswitching in the Classroom model, specifically to target writing. They also explain how codeswitching is used to create voice in literature. A refreshingly honest account of her struggle with the nebulous notion of linguistics comes from Deidre Carlson in Chapter 18, “A primary teacher’s linguistic journey” (244-250). Carlson was Kristin Denham’s partner teacher, and she found that traditionally-taught grammar doesn’t build on students’ prior knowledge or encourage discovery, and also makes teachers nervous about what they know and don’t know. What she likes about linguistic discovery is that it leaves plenty of room for addressing multiple learning styles, and can be used to combat linguistic prejudice, teaching linguistic choices rather than judging.

Chapter 19, “Why do VCE English Language?” (251-256) features a discussion by two teachers of the new Australian subject, Caroline Thomas and Sara Wawer. They praise the development of critical thinking/ analytical skills and organic/ authentic examples inherent in the subject, but lament that they are often the only teachers of their subject in the building.

In Chapter 20, “Language lessons in an American middle school” (257-263), Athena McNulty goes into detail about the variety of issues with which a classroom teacher must grapple, which nicely situates the priority for teachers of introducing a new subject into an overextended curriculum. She provides some examples of the lessons used in the class, pointing out that students loved morphology problems. David Pippin, to whom we were introduced in an earlier chapter, discusses “The diary of Opal Whiteley: a literary and linguistic mystery” in Chapter 21 (264-271), a text chosen in order to elicit discussion with his students about grammatical choices in literature.

Chapter 22, “Using the Voices of North Carolina curriculum” (272-276), features two teachers, Leatha Fields-Carey and Suzanne Sweat, telling of their experiences in the classroom addressing linguistic prejudice, systematicity of dialects, and differences between regular and honors students (the former had faced linguistic prejudice where the latter had not). In the final chapter in the volume, Chapter 23, “A-level English Language teaching in London” (277-281), Dan Clayton highlights a slang lesson in a language change and variation unit in a multilingual, multi-ethnic inner city London school.

Overall, *Linguistics at School* is a helpful addition to the small but growing canon of literature about linguistics in the K-12 classroom. The heavy push by many of the authors for collaboration between linguists and classroom teachers can be seen as a call to action, and the resources provided are quite welcome in an area that has not come close to approaching its peak of interest.

I wear two hats as an urban high school teacher and a Ph.D. student in linguistics, and I am often alone in understanding the skepticism on the parts of both linguists and classroom teachers in collaborating. It is true that many linguists think of teachers as uninformed and naïve in their linguistic knowledge. Of course, this is true for many people; there are so few required courses in linguistics for K-12 educators outside of ESL teacher training. Many teachers think of linguists as just another sort of ivory-tower specialist claiming to know more than they do about what is pedagogically sound for their students, when in fact many of these

specialists have no clue about the balancing acts that go on in schools every day, held together by skilled teachers. I applaud those authors who swallowed their pride to work past these issues and preconceptions in order to work with teachers and linguists for the greater good of the students.

There are a few standout bits of information that I wish to highlight here. In his foreword, Jackendoff states, “Many of the contributors stress that teaching mainstream English proves far more effective if the language can be viewed as a tool rather than a threat intended to supplement rather than supplant students’ customary linguistic practices” (xiv). Linguists know this to be true, and educators are coming around to this post-prescriptivist notion, but the need persists for materials teachers can use now (like Wheeler and Swords’ 2006 book), and for studies teachers and linguists can cite when defending their stances to administrators and politicians who are vocal against any use of non-standard varieties of English in the classroom. Trousdale in Chapter 4 contends, “[t]he general statements of intent regarding the place of language in the new curriculum in ACfE [Scottish government’s A Curriculum for Excellence] seem to reflect existing practices. For instance, there is an emphasis on the value of the community languages of Scotland, and the benefits for education of such a diverse linguistic situation: teachers are especially encouraged to use the varieties of language that children bring to the classroom in order to develop an enthusiasm for language, to explore issues of identity and community, as is currently the case” (52). The education of teachers with regard to their students’ dialects can only serve to help both teachers and students understand their command of both varieties and how this linguistic knowledge will serve them in different situations.

As I embark on my dissertation research, which involves finding an urban school site with a predominantly minority population, Wheeler’s advice in Chapter 9 has already been useful to me. Having had little success finding a site based on my original proposal, I read Wheeler’s advice (gleaned from Walt Wolfram) to “[n]ever name the variety” (131-32), but rather to refer to “formal” and “informal” English. I changed my proposal for this last site, and I have already received a more positive response than I have from the other sites I approached. Wheeler also advises readers to get teachers to change their linguistic beliefs by having them teach discovery methods to their students: in the process, these teachers they will come to respect linguistic diversity. Finally, Wheeler advises never, ever to mention or agree to connections with Ebonics.

I was also happy to have access to the websites provided by some of the authors for linguistically-minded materials for K-12 teachers, such as

Denham's <http://teachling.wvu.edu>, which is best for younger kids, but even contains materials for math classes. She offers a really nice lesson on deductive morphology (196) that is similar to one that I've had success with in high school and ESL classes at a variety of levels.

Finally, I really appreciated McNulty's honesty about what a K-12 teacher really goes through, balancing such items as governmental regulations for curriculum and assessment, multi-level classrooms, and dropout prevention. As these are rarely the concern of university educators, teachers must be explicit in dealing with "experts" in terms of the directions in which they are pulled and the problems they face. These problems should be talked through, not used as an avoidance of new approaches.

With the publication of books such as *Linguistics at School*, Edwards' (2010) *Language Diversity in the Classroom*, and Charity Hudley and Mallinson's (forthcoming) *Understanding English Language Variation in U.S. Schools*, it seems that conversations are finally taking place between linguists and educators about dealing with language in the K-12 classroom. It is my personal hope that this collaboration results in increased understanding of language variety, linguistics in the teacher training curriculum, and a mutual respect between linguists and educators as they work toward the common goal of making our students smarter.

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