

Introduction

Rethinking Traditional Perspectives

The study of language disability is in a period of change. For some time, the psycho-bio-medical approach has orientated our understanding of language-related disabilities, such as specific speech and language impairment, dyslexia and deafness. The focus of research has been the nature (phenotypes) and core characteristics of language disabilities. Findings have been applied to practices concerned with identification, assessment and intervention of core features of disabilities. More recently, this approach has been extended to contexts of cultural and linguistic diversity (CLD) and sociolinguistic concerns (e.g. Genesee *et al.*, 2004; Centeno *et al.*, 2007). We are in a position now to consider the extent to which the traditional paradigm is a sufficient tool to explore and explain how language-related disabilities work in complex dimensions of social, cultural and linguistic diversity.

This book critiques the traditional approach to language-related disabilities through a sociocultural lens. The critique draws on Vygotskian and sociocultural perspectives to (re)interpret psychological and sociolinguistic research, and present a theoretically coherent view of language disabilities in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts. From a Vygotskian and sociocultural perspective, learning is both social and cognitive, and enabled by language. It is a particularly appropriate and powerful perspective for the purposes of this book. A reconceptualisation of language disabilities in contexts of diversity emphasises the central role of language(s) and communication for learning and transformation. A sociocultural approach has implications not only for research and practice with bilingual children with language disabilities, but also for interprofessional learning for work with families and colleagues who are culturally and linguistically diverse.

The Context

Changing demographics among school student populations, from homogenous to diverse, presents particular challenges for research and practice in the field of special education and language disabilities.

Although the number of bilingual children in many countries has increased dramatically in the last few decades, most research continues to be focused on monolingual children (for review see Leonard, 1998) and comparatively few studies deal with speech and language-related disabilities in bilingual children.

The capability of practitioners to meet the needs of diverse student populations remains a controversial professional education issue. Educators of practitioners have continued to question whether practitioners – both trained and preservice – have the requisite skills and the necessary sensitivity toward diversity to meet the challenges associated with effectively teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students (Marbley *et al.*, 2007). This book engages with the challenge of preparing practitioners and researchers, where the majority are likely to be monolingual English, monocultural and white, but not limited to that group, who work with an increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse student and client population.

A specific example of the need to develop practitioners' knowledge is revealed in findings from research studies concerning professional confusion about 'disentangling' *learning* needs from *language-learning* needs for schooling (e.g. Troyna & Siraj-Blatchford, 1993; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Cline & Shamsi, 2000; Lindsay *et al.*, 2006). That is, professional practices continue to confuse the educational needs embedded in learning English as an additional language (EAL) with cognitive learning needs and specific speech, language and communication needs. Professional confusion highlights an important theoretical and empirical site for further research and is a focus for discussions in this book.

Children who appear to learn language differently or with difficulty are a resource for understanding how we perform language learning. They may be situated in diverse sociolinguistic contexts, or they may be differently equipped biologically for language learning. These children afford opportunities for us to tease apart the cultural assumptions made about language development and practices within and across distinct language communities. They also provide a site for us to interrogate theoretical, empirical and professional assumptions about language development, difference and disability.

Terminology

Some terms that are used frequently in the text are introduced here and discussed more fully in subsequent chapters.

Bilingualism is understood in a variety of ways. Monolinguals in monolingual cultures may believe that being bilingual is for a few 'special' people. In fact, one in three of the world's population routinely uses two or more languages for work, family life and leisure. If we include those who use two or more languages occasionally, then monolinguals are the minority (Li Wei, 2000: 5). Bilingualism is not only a feature of individual capability, but also of a society's identity. As a social practice in communities and in schools, bilingualism is a site of social and political tension in many countries that traditionally see themselves as monolingual, such as the UK, USA and Australia. In the USA, the bilingual education movement has grown into a political movement. It is driven partly by the English For All/English Only legislation, which was passed in States, such as California, that have substantial bilingual and non-English-speaking populations. In the UK, there is no similar political movement for bilingual education. Nevertheless, discourses at national level about bilingualism in citizenship, and the need for language testing among minority linguistic communities, shape the everyday lives of bilingual learners and the practitioners who work with them. These discourses are recognised as important influences on research and practice, and they are the backdrop for discussions in this book.

Being bilingual primarily describes someone with possession of two or more languages and often refers to multilingual people as well. The terms *multilingual* and *bilingual* are often used interchangeably in the literature and they are in this book. These terms include speakers with varying degrees of proficiency across languages, from understanding only, to include speaking and literacy skills in both languages. While bilingualism may include school-taught foreign languages, particularly English as a foreign language (EFL), it usually refers to learning and using language on a regular basis for everyday use. Communicating through two or more languages is both an individual's skill, and also a collective practice in families and societies. Using a language is usually domain-specific, related to people, places or topic. Language is also linked closely with identity and allegiance; bilingual people's preference for using only one language may reflect their changes in self-identity and community allegiances (Baker, 1992; Myers-Scotton, 2006).

Second language learning. In addition to the terms bilingual and multilingual, there are many terms describing speakers of two or more languages. Some terms indicate the sequence of language acquisition while others index importance of one of the learners' languages. Among the most commonly used terms are *Second Language Acquisition* (SLA),

Second Language (L2) learners, learners of *English as an Additional Language (EAL)*, *English as a Second Language (ESL)*, and a term used mainly in the USA, *Limited English Proficiency (LEP)*.

Cultural and linguistic diversity (CLD) is a generic term that is increasingly used by researchers and practitioners. CLD indexes the range of sociocultural contexts and practices, including race, cultural heritage, religious beliefs, social class and socioeconomic status, which inform the social processes that shape the social and educational experiences of communities, families and individual learners. Throughout the book, I mainly use the terms: bilinguals, EAL learners and CLD. In citing studies, the terms of the authors are used.

Diversity is a term often used to describe and to emphasise the heterogeneity and complexity of differences across disability, culture and language. Diversity offers an alternative to simplistic bipolar constructs. For example, the notion of disability is often understood as a homogeneous 'other' that contrasts with the notion of able-ness (Norwich, 1990; Wedell, 2005). In this book, the main driver for discourses of diversity is the protection of minority groups from discriminatory descriptions. Discussions about diversity here, seek to make visible and conscious assumed (nonconscious) beliefs and to (re)present more fairly and inclusively groups in society that are vulnerable to majority exclusionary forces.

Culture is often thought of in normative ways, as neatly bound traditions that help to differentiate groups of people, as when we say: 'Irish do this; English do that'. In this way, the concept of culture is presented as well-integrated, cohesive entities whose values are shared by all members of a group, each with its own predictable folk theory, values, socialisation patterns and academic outcomes (Moll, 2000: 257). Sociology has abandoned this structural construct and moved to a more process-based, dynamic understanding, where culture is multivoiced with unity and discords. This discourse of culture emphasises that *culture is in human practices* (Moll, 2000: 258). The term 'cultural and linguistic diversity' is informed by this concept, which enables us to recognise and conceptualise shared and diverse human practices both within and across apparent cultural structures. For example, understanding disability through values of human dignity is shared across diverse culture groups and underpins similar social practices.

The term *special education* specifically refers to specialist education provision for particular learners with disabilities and special educational needs (SEN). In the UK and many countries, it has been replaced by inclusive education. Most learners with additional learning needs are

included in mainstream education supported by additional resources where necessary. In the USA, bilingual education is a part of 'special education' provision. Bilingual education in the UK refers to a small amount of provision for bilingual learners learning in two languages, namely in Wales and Scotland. Minority community languages, which in many countries are the first languages of bilingual children, are generally taught in supplementary schools outside mainstream provision in the UK (see Creese *et al.*, 2006). Bilingual learners of EAL are included in mainstream education in the UK.

Terms for disability vary within the field of disability studies and they emerge from different traditions. There are terms such as handicap, impairment, SEN and disability, as well as the descriptor terms for cognitive, sensory and physical categories of disability. Category terms can be used differently across countries. The term 'learning difficulties' in the UK is synonymous with 'mental retardation' in the USA, and 'dyslexia' or 'specific learning difficulties' in the UK is known as 'learning difficulties' in the USA. The terms 'disorder' and 'impairment' are from a medical discourse traditionally used in research and practice around language: specific language impairment, children's communication disorders. The terms 'difficulties' and 'needs' are from a discourse of social models of disability and are used in this book to describe language disabilities. Discourses of disability are discussed more fully in Chapter 3.

In this book I have chosen to examine what is traditionally known as 'categories of impairment', which concern language-related disabilities, specifically, speech and language difficulties, dyslexia and deafness. I have chosen them because they present a particularly sensitive site, around language and communication, where the axes for the construction of disability and diversity may be most easily confused. This site affords insightful exploration of how we conceptualise and perform practice in contexts of disability and diversity.

Blaming Diversity, Disabling Diversity

There are discourses that construct diversity as a problem. They present diversity and difference as interfering with the smooth running of aspects of mainstream society and services. Disruptions caused to mainstream life are the fault of individuals who are diverse or different. One analogy is that society is like a clock and when the clock breaks down it is not the *system* that is faulty, but rather individual elements within it (Paulston, 1992, in Baker, 2001: 399). Similar analogies are offered by Valencia (1997) concerning poorly made/broken spectacles,

and escalators that damage people who use them, where customers, and not the manufacturers, are blamed for damaged goods. He uses these analogies to illustrate the ways that barriers to education and other services are constructed for culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The more powerful manufacturers/providers of goods blame the less powerful users for the resulting damage and harm, rather than accept responsibility for faulty and inadequate goods. From this perspective, when problems are perceived by the dominant majority group, such as perceived threats to health, wellbeing and educational achievement, advocates assert that it is not the mainstream provision that needs to be corrected, but rather specific culturally and linguistically diverse consumers.

Social practices of exclusion and inclusion around language diversity are under-researched and not widely recognised by well-intentioned practitioners. An important focus of this book is to examine the social processes that 'blame diversity' for challenging mainstream provision of services, and which construct diversity itself as disabling.

Disability, SEN and Diversity

There are substantial challenges – barriers even – to doing a literature review in the area of disability, SEN and diversity. Research and professional practices have kept these areas separated by their own traditions (Daniels *et al.*, 2001a). Research and practice in this area has yet to become a recognised discipline or field of study. The area of 'disability and cultural and linguistic diversity' remains a space for the creation of new knowledge. It is a space shaped and informed by a range of bounded, compartmentalised disciplinary knowledges: biological, medical, health, education, disability, SEN, ethnicity, race, bilingualism, SLA, multiculturalism, equal opportunities, underachievement. It is a zone of potential reconceptualisation in future research.

A review of Canadian literature on the intersections of disability and race/ethnicity, heritage language and religion concludes that

So much research is needed that it is impossible to prioritize, except to return to the need for research to recognise the full participation of ethno-racial people with disabilities and their communities in the research process, from their vantage point, recognizing and valuing their expertise and addressing their benefit. (Steinstra, 2002: 22)

Steinstra (2002) analyses the literature during the 1990s along strands of the Canadian context, looking in turn at the intersections of race,

ethnicity, heritage languages and religion. She uses a social model of disability and identity frameworks to evaluate the studies. She concludes that there seem to be mainly two views of disability from a multicultural and multilingual perspective. Firstly, in the literature there is the 'either/or' construct, where disabled people from CLD heritages have a primary identity. People are constructed as having 'either' a primary identity as a disabled person who is also a member of a minority bilingual or cultural community, **or** conversely, they are primarily constructed as minority ethnic/linguistic with a disability. A second construct, 'both-and' posits dual or multiple identities for people with disability and diverse languages and cultures. For example, studies of minority ethnic people with deafness have explored both these notions of identity. They have examined the extent to which individuals construct themselves primarily *either* as Deaf and members of the Deaf community albeit from minority families *or* as being members of a minority ethnic/linguistic community who are also deaf. Alternatively, do they construct themselves as being *both* deaf *and* Deaf *and* a member of the minority ethnic community? In other words, identity is fluid and constructed *in situ* with the resources available. Research also needs to explore the extent to which service providers facilitate development of flexible multiple identities. How would a fluid identity of disability develop?

There are practices of exclusion in research on disability and diversity. Reflecting on one aspect of disability and diversity, Cline and Reason (1993: 30–34) observe about dyslexia and ethnicity:

it seems strange that the research traditions on specific learning difficulties (dyslexia) and social and cultural differences have remained in different compartments.

Many researchers of bilingualism, SLA and CLD explicitly note that they exclude discussion of children and learners who have biologically based educational difficulties, such as deafness, severe learning difficulties. Researchers may focus on sociocultural, including racist, practices that marginalise diversity, which perform 'disabling diversity'. On the other hand, approaches to studying disability that are embedded in biomedical-based difficulties often demonstrate either a lack of curiosity and inertia/resistance to exploring the contribution that CLD could offer to understanding disability, or they exclude children and adults who are culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse because these social factors 'contaminate' and complicate the research study (Diniz, 1999).

Nevertheless, there are important indicators that researching disability and diversity is emerging as a discipline of study, evidenced in handbooks

on special education and diversity and working with speech and language disability in bilingualism (Baca & Cervantes, 1998, 2003; Battle, 2002; Centeno *et al.*, 2007; Duncan, 1989; Frederickson & Cline, 2002; Genesee *et al.*, 2004; Harry, 1992; Isaac, 2002; Kayser, 1995; Kohnert, 2007; Miller, 1984).

This text attempts to mark out a field of study on bilingualism and disability, and where its core and boundaries might be. It draws together two fields of research and practice in bilingualism studies and disability studies, and reveals parallels and relationships between them. An inevitable consequence of the multidisciplinary nature of the area of disability, ethnicity and CLD is the 'underlap' in studies, and the consequent 'underlap' in conceptualisation. This book contributes to the enterprise of developing conceptualisations of language-related disabilities in contexts of cultural and linguistic diversity.

Chapter Themes

In this book, I develop a coherent and cohesive understanding of disability, specifically, language-related disabilities, in contexts of diversity by drawing on a sociocultural lens to bring into focus other approaches, which are prevalent in this area. The book opens with some broad perspectives on disability in contexts of cultural and multilingual diversity and introduces more specialist ideas in later chapters.

The sociocultural orientation for this book is set out in Chapter 1 to inform subsequent chapters. The following chapters open with a case study vignette that illustrates issues being discussed. The second chapter examines sociocultural contexts and practices around CLD and the discourses that construct CLD as 'barriers' to access and take up of provision. The third chapter explores inclusive and exclusive practices of health and education provision to culturally and linguistically diverse families and children with language disabilities. The fourth chapter examines the dominant cognitive discourse of the nature of speech, language and communication difficulties in children developing two languages. The fifth chapter examines discourses around dyslexia and explores the inter-relatedness of psychological and sociocultural research for educational practice. The sixth chapter explores deafness and Deafness in children with bilingual minority linguistic families and issues of multiple identities being deaf in diverse cultures, religions and ethnicities. Chapter 7 critiques formal assessment methods of language disabilities in bilingual children and explores the advantages of using

dynamic assessment approaches. Chapter 8 draws on learning theories to examine practices of intervention and teaching with bilingual children with language disabilities. Chapter 9 examines multidisciplinary collaboration among practitioners working to meet the needs of bilingual children with language difficulties. Chapter 10 explores practice and provision for bilingual parents and families with children with language disabilities.

The book works to achieve:

- (1) a (re)conceptualisation of language disabilities within a socio-cultural perspective;
- (2) a contribution to a community of research and practice around language-related disabilities in cultural and linguistic diversity;
- (3) a resource for students and researchers in this emerging field;
- (4) a resource for interprofessional development for mainstream and special needs teachers, psychologists, speech and language therapists and assistants involved in the field of language-related disabilities in culturally and linguistically contexts.

This book contributes to the small yet growing body of research, emergent conceptualisations and discourses in the field of language disability in linguistic diversity. It presents a critical reflection on, and (re)conceptualisation of, existing literature across pertinent areas of research and practice. The book is written for researchers and professionals from backgrounds in health and education who work with language-related disabilities in culturally and linguistic diversity. Its main focus and purpose is not so much on developing 'craft' and skills for practitioners' work, but rather on informing the assumptions that underpin policies and practice that frame practitioners and clients' daily routines. This approach supports professional development of masters and doctoral students, managers and policymakers in the fields of health, social work and education who work with each other as well as with and for those with language disabilities in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts. The next chapter presents key ideas about language and learning, context and diversity that orientate discussion throughout the book.

