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Wiley, Terrence G.; Lee, Jin Sook & Rumberger, Russell W.
(Eds.) (2009) *The Education of Language Minority Immigrants in
the United States*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters..

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This volume provides much needed interdisciplinary insights on immigrant language minority education in the United States. The contributors, a well-selected pool of authors with standing in their separate fields, represent a wide variety of disciplines—sociology, economics, linguistics, and education. As the editors indicate, despite the authors' different perspectives, two main threads run through this volume. First, all chapters address ways in which institutional policies and individual, family, and school practices can improve the educational outcomes and life experiences of immigrant language minority children. Second, all chapters underscore the importance of supporting language diversity both at school and at

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home and highlight the tremendously negative impact that English-only policies have on immigrant children.

This text is organized into three sections: (1) large-scale data analyses of language minority populations; (2) language, culture, and identity of language minority students; and (3) educational and language assessment policies for language minority children. Although this organization is mentioned in the introduction, it is not indicated in the table of contents or in the introduction to each chapter.

Overall, this is a most useful book. Each chapter is interesting, informative, and can be described variously as a comprehensive literature review, an original research study, or an educational policy study. Each chapter includes a very pertinent and valuable section for further reading consisting of brief annotated bibliographies. Each chapter is worth reading but can also stand on its own merits. However, in the context of this book, it is their combined impact that is more powerful.

The introductory chapter by editors Wiley and Lee serves a twofold purpose: first, to provide a historical discussion of the demographic, legal, and policy contexts of language diversity and language minority education in the United States; and second, to provide a fairly thorough overview of the chapters that comprise this volume.

In Chapter 1, “A Language Graveyard? The Evolution of Language Competencies, Preferences and Use Among Young Adult Children of Immigrants,” sociologist Rumbaut reports his findings from two studies with populations in California and South Florida: (1) the last phase of the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS), that followed 5000 1.5- and second-generation youth who arrived in the United States prior to adolescence, as well as US-born children of immigrants; and (2) the Immigration and Intergenerational Mobility in Metropolitan Los Angeles (IIMMLA) survey that gathered similar data on language and education from a multigenerational sample of young adults in the Los Angeles area. By focusing on variables such as generation, gender, geography, and ethnicity over a 10-year period, the author demonstrates that English fluency among the second-generation of language minority children is strong.

Unfortunately, this fluency comes with a high price: the loss of immigrants' native languages. Hence this data paints the US as a "language graveyard" that continues to promote and, in some cases, enforce linguistic homogeneity.

In the "Economics of Language of Immigrants: An Introduction and Overview," economist Barry Chiswick examines the determinants and consequences of developing language proficiency among immigrants. Viewing language as human capital and using the analyses of large data sets, the author establishes the relationships between the economics of language, educational achievement, and the job market. Applying a microeconomic lens, Chiswick contends that language proficiency among immigrants is modeled according to the three E's: Exposure to the host country's language, Efficiency in learning a new language, and the Economic incentives for learning the new language. Also briefly mentioned in this chapter are a variety of additional findings from the author's studies. For example, "children can have offsetting effects on their parents' proficiency" (p. 80), the proficiency of one family member is positively associated with that of other family members" (p. 81), and "the mother's proficiency is more important than that of the father for the English language proficiency of their children" (p. 87). Of course, readers need to be aware that the desire to learn a second language is not only driven by economic factors. Individual, cognitive, and affective factors, such as motivation, personality, and agency, need to be taken into account. Overall, the study of language proficiency offers an augmented perspective for "understanding the economic, political and social adjustment of immigrants, and hence their impact on the host country" (p. 72).

The chapter by Liu, Tai, and Fan entitled "Immigration, Race and Higher Education Outcomes" is based on a secondary data analysis of the widely used large-scale National Educational Longitudinal Study 88 (NELS) database, the data from which spans more than 12 years. Using the fixed categories of this data set, the authors concluded that given certain conditions, a student from an Asian immigrant family has the highest probability of earning a college degree. This group is followed by White and Black immigrant students. The next three groups are

White non-immigrants, Hispanic immigrants and Black non-immigrants. Lastly, the groups with the lowest probability of obtaining college degrees are Asian non-immigrants and Hispanic non-immigrants. While these findings are not surprising, their analysis highlights three important points: (1) The home language environment does not seem to have a differential effect on non-immigrant students seeking to earn college degrees but it does have a positive effect on the overall immigrant student grouping; (2) The status of the family--not of the individual student--has the biggest impact on educational outcome; and (3) The probabilities of earning a college degree is much higher for recent Asian immigrants than for students from non-immigrant Asian families. This last point counters the notion of Asians as the “model minority” by highlighting the role that immigrant status plays on academic achievement as opposed to the undifferentiated “Asian” category.

In Chapter 4, “Immigrant Youth in High School: Understanding Educational Outcomes for Students of Mexican Origin,” Regina Cortina presents findings and policy recommendations based on her analysis of Mexican immigrants’ educational trajectories in New York City. Her analysis brings to bear such factors as knowledge of Mexican culture, socioeconomic and educational data, and historical data related to Latin American immigrants, as well as focus group input to reveal both quantitatively and qualitatively a holistic depiction of the Mexican “graduating high school cohort of 1999” (p. 122). Results indicate that several factors impact the students’ probability of graduating: their arrival anytime before starting high school, their rapid break away from ELL courses, individual and family characteristics, and educational structural influences. Cortina closes the chapter with policy recommendations, such as expanding educators’ knowledge of immigrants’ own educational systems, increasing the availability of native language courses, assisting immigrant students in forming transnational identities, and expanding professional development for educators.

In the following chapter, “A Synthesis of the Roles of Heritage Languages in the Lives of Children of Immigrants: What Educators Need to Know,” authors Jin Sook Lee and Debra Suarez underscore the need for

educators to be aware of the importance of heritage languages among immigrant students and prepared to validate and promote heritage language maintenance. To this end the authors state that educators need to understand a heritage language not solely as a communication system positioned against English but as “a symbolic representation of [students’] identities, social relations, and their culture” (p. 160). Sandwiched between the review of the literature and the section on what educators need to know about language is an ambitious discussion of a cross-group comparison, illustrating the roles that heritage languages play in the lives of Korean and Mexican immigrant communities. While this is an interesting comparison that brings home some of the points highlighted earlier in the chapter, unfortunately, the page limitation does not allow for a more exhaustive discussion. The authors prefer the use of “heritage language” (instead of the more commonly used terms such as primary language, home language, mother tongue, first language, or native language) to refer to “a language other than English used by immigrants and possibly their children that symbolically and linguistically represents their country of origin” (p. 137), irrespective of the level of linguistic proficiency. While we agree that heritage language captures the students’ family trajectories, like any other label it also has some drawbacks. The term “heritage” may evoke images of an ancient ancestral language instead of a contemporary one.

In Chapter 6, “Assimilation and Resistance: How Language and Culture Influence Gender Identity Negotiation in First-Generation Vietnamese Immigrant Youth,” Nguyen and Stritikus present the results of a qualitative research study on the “gender identity negotiation” of thirty immigrant Vietnamese students attending three different schools in the Pacific Northwest. Results are presented as “brief portraits” of each school and also through a discussion of the usefulness of examining cultural adaptation through a gendered lens. Male Vietnamese students were found to adapt at a surface level, rejecting deep cultural change, preferring instead to maintain strong Vietnamese cultural identities. Conversely, female Vietnamese students were perceived by the disapproving males as changing their Vietnamese identities substantially through the process of adaptation. The authors’ work highlights the importance of studying

immigration and educational acculturation as gendered processes with often markedly different outcomes for male and female students.

In Chapter 7, “Agentive Youth Research: Towards Individual, Collective and Policy Transformation,” Kathryn Davis explores the increasing educational and economic disparity for marginalized, minority youth vs. the creation of agency at individual, collective, and policy levels by reviewing three important Hawaiian studies involving secondary and college language minority students. A unique aspect in these studies was the use of an agentive approach to investigate multifaceted heritage language and cultural identities while interrogating, challenging and appropriating academic English practices. The three examples explored represent individual and collective efforts to redress inequitable educational conditions. Using a postmodern lens to view language and culture, Davis frames her analysis with Bourdieu’s (1991) concepts of fields, habitus, capital, categories of individual resources (i.e., discursive, personal, and social), and the notion of “third space.” Her conclusion advocates “for a conceptualization of agency that supports the right of youth to engage in critical investigations that offer strategic knowledge and, thus, promote agency that holds promise for interactively supportive individual, collective and policy transformations” (p. 230). More importantly she makes the argument that agentive research can contribute to educational language research by moving beyond “what is” to a more empowering realization of “what can be”.

Chapters 8 and 9 examine the educational paths and assessment practices that affect the schooling experiences of English language learners. In Chapter 8, Mahoney, Haladyna, MacSwan undertake a study to assess the validity of the Stanford English Language Proficiency Test (SELP) in Arizona. Following a brief review of the educational and policy landscape affecting the schooling experiences of Arizona’s English language learners, the authors compare the differential outcomes between the use of one high stakes assessment (SELP) with the previous assessment process using multiple measures. As might be expected, they concluded that “a multiple-measures approach has greater predictive validity than a single-measure approach based on the SELP” (p. 240).

The following chapter, “Assimilation and resistance: How language and culture influence gender identity negotiation in first-generation Vietnamese immigrant youth” by George Bunch, examines students’ transitions from high school to community college and later to a four-year college using California’s Master Plan for higher education as a backdrop. The author specifically focuses on how immigrant students’ English language proficiency is constructed when they first enter a community college.

Due to California’s Master Plan that limits initial access to the University of California and California State University educational systems to the top one-third of high school graduates, community colleges serve as open-access institutions for the remaining two-thirds of potential university students. Two main conclusions can be garnered from this work. First, community colleges play a crucial role in the education of immigrant students—supporting or hindering students’ educational success. Second, current conceptualizations of English language proficiency, as constructed by educational institutions, will affect immigrant students’ transition from high school to college. In this regard, Bunch recommends the use of assessments and course-placement policies that create academic pathways for immigrant students who attended US high schools.

In Chapter 10, “Commentary: Language, Immigration and the Quality of Education: Moving Toward a Broader Conversation,” Guadalupe Valdés neatly ties together the individual chapters of this book and inserts them into the broader context of transnational migrations and globalization. Valdés argues that the equitable education of transnational minority students is a concern being wrestled with by many nations. In fact, she encourages scholars in the United States to a) frame their research in a way that educates policy makers and citizens at large about the growing international pressure on minority languages around the world; and b) relate their work to the struggles encountered by educators and researchers in the poorest countries of the world. By joining in these worldwide conversations and initiatives, “American scholars can help us all question and problematize indicators of educational quality that focus exclusively on cognitive development and consider reconciling a broader

range of humanistic, behavioral and critical educational perspectives” (p. 300).

This volume is a valuable compilation of papers addressing critical issues in the education of language minority immigrants. It should become a useful text for graduate students, researchers, policy makers, and others interested in understanding educational policy, research, and practice in this context. The diversity of disciplines and perspectives informing *The Education of Language Minority Immigrants in the United States* makes this volume an exemplar of the kind of dialogue that needs to take place by incorporating interdisciplinary perspectives and methodologies to better understand and develop effective efforts of addressing the educational needs of the growing population of language minority immigrants.

Reference

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About the Reviewers

Gisela Ernst-Slavit, PhD, is the Huie-Rogers Fellow and Professor of Education at Washington State University Vancouver. She investigates language and education in culturally and linguistically diverse settings using ethnographic and sociolinguistic perspectives. She is currently working on the relationship among academic language, immigrant language minority students and teacher preparation. Her recent books include *Access to Academics: Planning Instruction for K-12 Classrooms with ELLs* (2010), with Joy Egbert; and *From Theory to Practice: Implementing the PreK-12 English Language Proficiency Standards* (2009), with Margo Gottlieb and Anne Katz.

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