

BAAL Book Prize 2000

**The BAAL BOOK PRIZE 2000 was awarded at the
Cambridge Annual Meeting to:
Rachel Sutton-Spence and Bencie Woll**
The Linguistics of British Sign Language: An Introduction
Cambridge University Press

The three other shortlisted titles were:

A. Suresh Canagarajah
Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching
Oxford University Press

A. P. Cowie
English Dictionaries for Foreign Learners - a History
Oxford University Press

Alan Davies
An Introduction to Applied Linguistics: From Practice to Theory
Edinburgh University Press

Reviewer's Comments

The Linguistics of British Sign Language: An Introduction. Rachel Sutton-Spence and Bencie Woll. Cambridge University Press

Selected excerpts from the panel of judges (anonymous):

"Now at last we have a comprehensive overview of the linguistics of BSL, introductory enough for the many non-linguists who have professional or personal reasons to study BSL, but detailed enough to provide challenging examples for phonologists, morphologists, syntacticians, and sociolinguists who have worked only with spoken languages."

"The breadth of the book is a remarkable achievement... Though it is an introduction, it has good chapters on topics not covered outside of specialist journals, such as space types, visual motivation, productivity, and extended discourse such as stories. It is 'packed' with historical and social facts about BSL which provide a solid context for the pure linguistic descriptions. For those who are involved in or with the British Deaf community, it can provide a first course in linguistics. For those involved in and with linguistics, but who haven't followed recent research on sign language, it will be an eye-opener."

"The authors draw on research of sign languages internationally in a very convincing way, looking at the visual motivation which underlies all sign languages while acknowledging the differences... To users of spoken languages, a visuo-spatial language presents a whole set of features which could be off-puttingly difficult to understand. Explaining movements and including illustrations which do this in a comprehensible way is challenging. It has been done well."

"As a trainer of Communication Support Workers I have already used this book in my teaching, and seen the positive results in my students' work. By having a comprehensive guide to the grammar of BSL, they are able to compare BSL and English and understand how different the languages are. The book encourages readers to observe deaf users of BSL and to collect linguistic evidence for themselves."

"The effects of this book will be immense: in deaf education there are still many teachers who do not recognise that BSL is a language. Once its status is clearer, and BSL can be

studied like any other language with a text book, then we can hope that first language users of BSL will be allowed to teach the language to deaf children."

"Deaf tutors of BSL have waited for a decade for a book like this to guide them in their teaching of the language... many tutors will want to see the book translated into BSL as soon as possible... now that the quality of sign language teaching in the UK has reached a critical point."

"American Sign Language has been studied much more, and those of us whose BSL is limited have had to use lots of ASL illustrations in linguistics classes just because they were what linguists had used for examples. But BSL is what we see in our televisions and in deaf clubs, and BSL is what hearing people learn in classes, and BSL is what matters in British discussions of educational or professional or broadcasting policies."

"One truly remarkable aspect of this book is its accessible style. Difficult concepts are tackled in a magically simple style that any half-interested reader is likely to grasp - will want to read more. Yet there is no 'dumbing-down' or popularising - there is clarity and lucidity of description, and use of necessary technical terms with complete avoidance of jargon or obscurity."

"Anyone who picks up the book and looks at the wonderfully clear and expressive pictures will find themselves reading the text to find out what is going on, and then going back to the beginning of the chapter and reading further, and then going on to the end of the book."

Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching. A. Suresh Canagarajah. Oxford University Press

Selected excerpts from the panel of judges (anonymous):

"It is an original and ground-breaking contribution to Applied Linguistics and Language Education. It is written within a now-familiar post-colonial framework, and acknowledges and critiques other work on the dominance of English. Argument and analysis are intellectually sophisticated but remain grounded in the paradoxes of postcolonial English while avoiding essentialising and programmatic over-simplification. The book provides a powerful corrective to Anglo-American 'leadership' in Global English. It is imperative reading for anyone concerned with ELT know-how, especially with the export and/or import of the language and of approaches to its learning."

"This is an outstanding, complex, and path-breaking book, with clear and comprehensive contextualisation of both its theoretical perspectives and its research methodology. Particularly refreshing and significant is the adoption of an interdisciplinary perspective which assumes language education is a socio-political, not just socio-cognitive act. It is deeply versed in applied linguistics, pedagogy (mainstream and ELT), ideology, and North-South relations. It draws on original empirical work in a vexed post-colonial country (Sri Lanka), builds on radical analyses of linguistic imperialism, and synthesises an English language pedagogy that is theoretically powerful and practically emancipatory. The book provides guidelines for the development of a critical pedagogy in formally colonised communities in which the role of English is deeply ambivalent and attitudes towards its learning varied."

"What makes it so remarkable are the detailed descriptions of the complex situation in Jaffna: students' marginal comments in textbooks, teachers' difficulties with the broken blackboard, contradictions of using and rejecting English at a border checkpoint. Canagarajah has a gift for evoking the look and feel and tension of a classroom."

"The style is readable, personal, committed, and projects a view of "the periphery" of English language teaching from the periphery in order to yield new insights, not just a predictable political position."

English Dictionaries for Foreign Learners - A History. A. P. Cowie. Oxford University Press

Selected excerpts from the panel of judges (anonymous):

"This is a masterly, comprehensive survey of the field ... There are lessons for us all here, about the cost of ignoring our history and re-inventing the wheel. The book provides a detailed and coherent account of the first, second and third generation of EFL

dictionaries, and has a particular merit in placing the achievements of earlier dictionary makers in a developmental perspective for the first time."

"The author is a participant in the history, and probably an important one. Cowie succeeds in giving an involving, unbiased account of the history and the theory. His knowledge of the literature, and willingness to look back and be (adversely) critical of work in which he was involved, ensure that a non-specialist, the intended audience, reading this work, can feel that they have been given an authoritative account of both areas."

"Monolingual dictionaries intended for learners who speak other languages are a feature of ELT publishing. This study of their history in ELT is an interesting study of how applied linguistics develops and of the interaction between theory and application."

"Although the book seems to be primarily targeted at lexicographers and students of lexicography, it will also appeal to a less specialised readership who are interested in observing processes of cross-fertilisation between teaching methodologies, the vocabulary control movement, grammatical theory, phraseology and corpus linguistics."

"Most applied linguists deal with learners' dictionaries in one way or another: in teaching EFL, or using corpora, or considering analytical categories. As the market expands and becomes even more competitive, large claims are made for each innovation. Thus it is useful to have a sober, scholarly, and engaged history of the origins and development of the genre, focusing on key lexicographers of the 1930s and 1940s. Cowie is able to bring his own expertise to bear in analysing the detailed decisions of earlier dictionary-makers about matters of headwords, grammatical information, or defining vocabulary... This is a useful start that will remain a reference for decades, and no one else could have written it."

An Introduction to Applied Linguistics: From Practice to Theory. Alan Davies. Edinburgh University Press

Selected excerpts from the panel of judges (anonymous):

"This is a well-informed contribution from an experienced practitioner: it offers an historical perspective and provides useful references and follow-up suggestions for introductory MA in Applied Linguistics seminar discussion."

"Anyone who has just finished an MA, or is just starting a PhD, or is thinking about a big research project, would find it provocative and illuminating, even if they don't agree with it."

"This is not, in fact, a general introduction for someone new to the field, one that would try to cover all approaches current at meetings and in the journals (and such a broad introduction may no longer be possible). It is an attempt to define and delimit the field in general terms, as a basis for planning projects and evaluating new theories."

"From the outset the book leaps into controversies about the nature of the field, under the guise of giving definitions, instead of trying to draw in a non-specialist. Later chapters assume some knowledge of the various positions within applied linguistics. But it serves a purpose in its polemics, opening up discussion of what it means to be a discipline, a profession, a field, and how these various claims for status might relate to the essential requirement that applied linguistics be applied."

"The style gives the strong sense of an individual voice: learned, witty, experienced, and committed, with a personal take on the field and a broad view of academic life."