

BAAL Book Prize 2004

The 2004 BAAL book prize was awarded to:

Scollon, Ron & Scollon, Suzie Wong (2003)

Discourses in place: language in the material world

Routledge

The titles short-listed for the 2004 BAAL Book Prize were:

Rogers, Rebecca (2003)

A critical discourse analysis of family literacy practices

Lawrence Erlbaum.

Schjerve, Rosita Rindler (ed.) (2003)

Diglossia & power

Mouton de Gruyter

Schreier, Daniel (2003)

Isolation & language change

Palgrave Macmillan

Reviewer's Comments

Scollon, Ron & Scollon, Suzie Wong (2003) *Discourses in place: language in the material world*. Routledge.

Discourses in Place offers a systematic analysis of how to interpret language as it is materially placed in the social world. The authors see meaning as deriving from three elements: (1) the semiotic meaning potentials of language, visual semiotics and other semiotic systems; (2) the forms and styles of social interaction that govern how social actors select from these meaning potentials; and (3) the constraints and affordances of the places in which social interactions are situated. Such an approach extends the notion of 'meaning' (how we make sense of signs), and advances current discourse analytical research and social semiotic research that still operates very much within the boundary of texts.

The book moves, step by step, towards a synthesis of the three elements. It is written with great lucidity and clarity, and with an engaging sense of the authors' personal involvement in their subject. Abundantly illustrated with clear and concrete examples of situated signs and interactions drawn from many parts of the world, and inviting the reader to observe and document examples of their own, the book admirably combines semiotic analysis and ethnography. It can function both as a textbook (clear introduction to some key theories, with exercises, glossary and other pedagogical features) and a monograph which shows a new way forward in integrating and extending these theories. This is an important and highly original book which is likely to initiate a whole new approach to teaching and researching language in social life.

Rogers, Rebecca (2003) *A critical discourse analysis of family literacy practices*. Lawrence Erlbaum.

This is a very timely volume, exploring the complexity of family literacy practices through an in-depth study of one family. The study focuses on a 'low income' and 'low literate' African American mother and daughter, and the complex language and literacy practices in which they engage as they negotiate their identities in school, community and family. Situated in the asymmetrical power relations evident in the discursive practices of their daily lives, their story is at once readable, moving and theoretically grounded.

The originality of the study lies in its post-disciplinarity. That is, the author is not constrained by traditional barriers, but develops a coherent theoretical framework which incorporates the New Literacy Studies, cultural reproduction theory, and Critical Discourse Analysis. The appropriation of Critical Discourse Analysis enables Rogers to provide a detailed and precise account of the range of discourses which serve to disempower the key protagonists at local and institutional levels.

The strength of the volume lies in its attention to detail. It identifies ways in which boundaries between home and school are constructed and reproduced in discourse and asks important questions about the stratification of various types of literacy events and practices. Other studies have provided accounts of home and school literacy practices and discontinuities between these domains. However, this volume goes further, as it provides detailed analysis of institutional decision-making in relation to an individual child's education.

The volume benefits from a clarity of organisation and written style which renders it accessible to readers with little specialist knowledge of the field. This is a study which should be of great value to students and seasoned academics alike.

Schjerve, Rosita Rindler (ed.) (2003) *Diglossia & power*. Mouton de Gruyter.

This book has a historical orientation and focuses on one geopolitical context (the 19th century Habsburg Empire). It is a remarkable publication and deserves a wide audience, as it could be highly influential in stimulating further studies and in taking forward the theoretical and methodological issues it addresses. Its central aim is to explore "the inter-connections between socio-institutional practices, language and hegemony in a multilingual society of the past" (p.1), but its relevance to other times and places (not least to present-day Europe) is apparent at every stage.

The book is expertly edited by a leading Austrian scholar, who has assembled a team of colleagues – historians and linguists in Vienna – to collaborate closely on a common project: this is not an anthology but a joint venture that has been carefully planned and coherently organised around a clearly articulated theme. The result is a tightly constructed volume that embeds six diverse but related case studies in an original theoretical and methodological framework. Its originality lies not so much in the treatment of specific topics or in the introduction of novel concepts or analytical techniques. Rather, its importance lies in the breadth and depth of coverage of this geographical and historical space, on the one hand, and on the other in the integration of key ideas that have dominated sociolinguistic research in this area for the last 15-20 years into a 'multi-functional' framework, focusing on a discourse-oriented definition of diglossia in order to reveal relationships between multilingualism and social power from a conflict perspective.

In sum, the book makes an original and highly stimulating contribution to a major field of study within applied linguistics and it shows extremely high standards of scholarship and production.

Schreier, Daniel (2003) *Isolation & language change*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Schreier's book is the first sociolinguistic study of the most isolated permanent community in the world, Tristan da Cunha. The book is comprehensive: it can be read as an extremely lucid and critical account – with a fascinating case-study at its core – of language contact, dialect contact and language isolation, and their link to new-dialect formation (koineisation).

The author account's of the dialect contact literature is excellent. He also provides a good historical account of the island's colonization and changes in social and residency patterns.

The level of discussion in the early, theory-led part of the book is high, and feeds directly into the empiricism of the main body and the discussion of the results. There is, thus, a high level of coherence in the writing.

The linguistic analysis of four morphological variables is first rate and Schreier's interpretation is well considered and sound. As a bonus, we have an account of the phonology of Tristan English in the Appendix.

The book is also a human document: Schreier, more than most other visitors, seems to have been able to empathise with the way of life and traditions of the community. He has a touching modesty, too, in that, as he admits, local people continue to be uninterested in linguistic issues, despite his evident enthusiasm for them.

The book is wonderfully well written and readable, capable of being enjoyed by readers with a wide variety of backgrounds and expertises.