



BAAL Book Prize 2010

The 2010 BAAL book prize was awarded to:

Besnier, N. (2009)

Gossip and the Everyday Production of Politics
University of Hawaii Press

The titles shortlisted for the 2010 BAAL Book Prize are:

Besnier, N. (2009)

Gossip and the Everyday Production of Politics
University of Hawaii Press

Grabe, W. (2009)

Reading in a Second Language.
Cambridge University Press

Higgins, C. (2009)

English as a Local Language
Multilingual Matters

McGregor, W. (2009)

Linguistics: An Introduction.
Continuum.

Reviewers' Comments

Besnier, N. (2009) *Gossip and the Everyday Production of Politics*, University of Hawaii Press -- First review

Besnier's book is outstanding in my opinion in that it attempts to go deeply into the meanings which are interactively produced in gossip exchanges on Nukulaelae, showing how they cannot be understood without reference to larger scale phenomena of political ideology and structure. In doing so he demonstrates once again, in a very convincing way, the need for a rich understanding of the context of interaction, as against the rather reduced and impoverished notions of context current in CA for example. He links in a lucid and exemplary way a minute interactional analysis of gossip exchanges to the large scale sociocultural, economic and historical dynamics, showing how human actors both embody and produce/reproduce social orderings within the larger contexts in which they operate. Much linguistic analysis provides an illusory sense of neatness to interaction, Besnier in contrast emphasizes in his analysis incommensurability, contingency and emergence, the fragile, temporary, unfinished nature of the gossip conversations that are his focus. Such conversations would be beneath the radar of much so called "ethnographic" fieldwork. There are of course lessons in this for linguistic analysis more generally.

Reflexivity has become something of a truism in research accounts, however Besnier writes himself into the research in ways that are revealing and thought provoking, as for example when one of his audio recordings unintentionally serves to amplify and disseminate gossip that would otherwise have stayed within the confines of the cooking hut, raising the issue of whether there can be such a thing as entirely ethically clean research.

The perspective on gossip developed here and localized within the texture of Nukulaelae life suggests an approach that could be fruitful in other different contexts, for example in social networking environments such as Facebook.

It is for these reasons that Besnier's "Gossip and the Everyday Production of Politics" stands out for me in the BAAL Book Prize shortlist.

Besnier, N. (2009) *Gossip and the Everyday Production of Politics*, University of Hawaii Press -- Second review

In this outstanding book, Niko Besnier offer an up-close, fine-grained ethnography of the inhabitants of Nukulaelee Atoll, part of Tuvalu, a group of islands in the South Pacific. In the 8 chapters and 240 or so pages which make up this book, the writer's main achievement is that he really gets into the detail of the linguistic and cultural features of the setting he is studying. Through the informal conversations and interactions of this group of islanders,

Besnier uncovers the cultural complexities of a micro society in addition to offering detailed profiles (on a micro scale) of its inhabitants. By linking the topic of gossip to larger contexts, including social and political influences, the author is able to demonstrate very clearly how a detailed description of context is necessary from a research perspective and how it is impossible to make sense of social interactions without taking account of bigger influences. The strength of the book, in my opinion, lies in its use of two distinct research traditions: detailed analysis of interactional data using principles derived from CA, in addition to a more macro analysis of social processes which are linked to anthropology. At the same time, the researcher constantly reminds the reader of the problems and difficulties of conducting this kind of research and of the dangers of making sweeping statements from the data. Monologues and dialogues are used to illustrate and highlight important political issues. Using detailed analyses of gossip exchanges, Besnier demonstrates very clearly the ways in which humans both typify and are constrained by the social and political norms of the larger context in which they exist.

Rather than emphasizing completeness in his analysis, it is very refreshing to note that Besnier constantly emphasizes the temporary, transitional and emergent status of the analysis. He does not shy away from issues of reflexivity and is constantly aware of his position in the analysis process. Rather, he uses this position to offer additional insights into the data and raise thought-provoking questions relating to ethics and analysis. There is no doubt that this approach could be easily transferred to other contexts and that new understandings of social interaction would emerge. Indeed, the book raises many important questions relating to research involving humans, some ethical, some related to accuracy and equity.

This book should be essential reading for anyone engaged in research with human subjects, particularly in contexts where researchers are interested in the relationship between social interaction and culture. It is written in an interesting and engaging manner in which the reader is taken on the same 'journey' as that of the researcher. For its originality, accessibility, contribution and relevance to many engaged in applied linguistics research, this book is, in my opinion, fully deserving of the BAAL Book Prize 2010

Grabe, W. (2009), *Reading in a Second Language*, Cambridge University Press

The book offers rich insights into the concept of reading. Highly technical, yet it is easy to read; affording the reader the rare privilege of a free flowing prose, almost like reading an interesting fiction. It has the ability to hold the reader's attention from one page to the other. The book explores a wide variety of issues in reading and every chapter holds key issues in reading. It also offers a very good flow from one chapter to the other e.g. the link between chapters 6 and 7. The Chapter on Motivation is a bonus; and the inclusion of chapters on curriculum and assessment makes the book like a 'Jack of all about reading and a master of all'.

Higgins, C. (2009), *English as a Local Language, Multilingual Matters*

The book addresses a timely subject; local languages. The author examines English as a local language in Africa (namely, East Africa), the use of English for various purposes, and wonderfully discusses larger social and linguistic issues while doing so. The examination of spoken interaction and visual communication is done with rigour and creativity. I recommend the book to be shortlisted.

McGregor, W. (2009), *Linguistics: An Introduction*. Continuum.

William McGregor's *Linguistics: An Introduction* is a student-focused, accessible and thorough text. It is distinguished by the author's ability to explain complex concepts addressing the reader in a direct, personal style, while maintaining a clear, authoritative voice. This is important, given its intended audience and the 'responsibility' of its brief as an introduction to this fascinating, wide-ranging discipline. As such, the book offers a broader spread than many other introductions to the field, starting from the very fundamentals, the notion of sign and extending to a chapter on communication systems in other animals. Despite being an introduction to linguistics, the material is never oversimplified. On the contrary, the author seems to delight in throwing in tantalising 'tasters' of more challenging concepts rarely covered in comparable texts.

There is a contemporary feel to the design and layout of the book. It has been very well-thought out to give maximum accessibility and readability, even down to right-justified page numbers in large font for easy flicking to the desired page. The book is evidently designed with its 'digital native' readership in mind, that is, readers used to accessing knowledge on web pages, with text in accessible chunks. Thus, 'pause for thought' and 'issues for further

thought and exercises' appear on the page in text boxes; each chapter is preceded by a mini 'table of contents', which saves referring back and forth to the main table of contents. The text is cross-referenced to a companion website and each chapter closes with an annotated guide to further reading and a summary giving clear, concise definitions of its core concepts and terminology (this is supported by the book's comprehensive glossary). The book thus eschews the traditional, text-dense layout of many other works in this area, in favour of one modelled on digital media. The register, is furthermore, kept fairly informal and contemporary, with expressions such as 'weird' 'messy', 'slavishly' 'get a handle on', and, unlike any textbook with which I am familiar, the author has gone out on a limb and used contractions ('haven't', 'don't').

All in all, I suspect that this book has set a new benchmark for linguistics textbooks. I will definitely be adding *Linguistics: An Introduction* to the core texts on relevant syllabi in my own teaching and I would be delighted to recommend the book for the BAAL book prize 2009.

BAAL Book Prize 2010 List of Books Received

Title	Author	Publisher
Applying cognitive linguistics to second language learning and teaching	Jeannette Littlemore	Palgrave
Linguistics: an introduction	William McGregor	Continuum
The handbook of business discourse	Francesca Bargiela-Chiappini	Edinburgh University Press
Dialects of English: Indian English	Pingali Sailaja	Edinburgh University Press
Bilingual first language acquisition	De Houwer	Multilingual Matters Textbooks
English Language: description, variation and context	Culpeper et al	Palgrave
The new sociolinguistics reader	Coupland and Jaworski	Palgrave
Motivation, language identity and the L2 self	Dornyei and Ushioda (eds)	Multilingual Matters
Reading in a second language	William Grabe	CUP
Bilingual education in the 21 st century	Ofelia Garcia	Wiley Blackwell
Dying words	Nicholas Evans	Wiley Blackwell
Word crime	John Olsson	Continuum
Language, meaning and the law	Chris Hutton	Edinburgh University Press
The discourse of politics in action	Ruth Wodak	Palgrave
The psychology of second language acquisition	Zoltan Dornyei	OUP
Gossip and the everyday production of politics	Niko Besnier	University of Hawaii Press
English as a local language	Christina Higgins	Multilingual matters
Double talk: deconstructing monolingualism in classroom second language learning	Virginia Scott	Prentice Hall