

BOOK REVIEW

Primer for professionals

Linguistics for non-linguists

Frank Parker

Taylor & Francis, 1986.

Speech pathologists are named as one of the intended audiences of this 'primer' in linguistics. The core of the book is a set of chapters on pragmatics, semantics, syntax, morphology, phonology, language variation, language acquisition, and the neurology of language. Each chapter contains exercises, answers, and further reading.

The book has two main limitations. First, it deals only with English. There are a couple of casual references to other languages, but otherwise, no hint is given of the real strength of the subject,

which is to find a system in the apparent chaos of the world's languages. 'English linguistics' would have been a better title.

Secondly, the book deals only with generatively-inspired linguistics. Notions from outside this frame of reference are either dismissed or not mentioned. A good example of the reasoning is in the language acquisition chapter 'there are other views', says the author (p. 168), 'but rather than go into them here, I'll tell you about Chomsky's.' Piaget gets a line, and the most important domain of current child language research – caretaker speech – isn't mentioned at all. (Nor, oddly, given the importance the author attributes to pragmatics – by making it his Chapter 2 – is pragmatic development referred to.)

I don't like this way of doing things. The author candidly admits his bias in the intro-

duction, and keeps telling the reader that there are other ways of looking at the field, but without any attempt at exposition this is just lip-service. And some of the topics omitted, as a consequence, are surprising. Excluded as not being 'central' is the whole domain of psycholinguistics – though there are many who think of this as the most central domain of all. Language change, likewise, isn't in. And there is no reference to functional accounts of analysis (though subject and object do creep, without comment, into the grammar chapter, p. 52).

Readers of this periodical will be particularly interested in the neurology of language chapter, but they will be disappointed. We are given a summary of basic anatomy, a historical listing of famous neurologists, starting with Gall and Flourens, and an outline of general notions (e.g.

handedness) and disorders. It is all neurology and neuropsychology and not what we would expect – neurolinguistics. It makes no use of the linguistic constructs presented elsewhere in the book.

I feel that the subject has been short-changed. Parker writes clearly and enthusiastically; his examples and exercises are well thought out; and he gives clear explanations of those aspects of the subject he chooses to deal with. But it's no real guide to what a lot of linguists are currently interested in. The book falls into a tradition of blinkered US writing in recent years, in which anything outside the perceived mainstream of study is ignored. I have the feeling that Parker can see further than this – and I wish he had used his fine expository skills to present a more representative account of the subject.

David Crystal

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